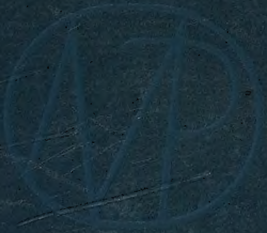

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

"When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past . . ."

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST
IS A TRANSLATION OF THE SEVEN-VOLUME WORK
A LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU
BY MARCEL PROUST

grouped in this two-volume edition as follows:

I

I. DU CÔTÉ DE CHEZ SWANN	*Swann's Way*
II. A L'OMBRE DES JEUNES FILLES EN FLEURS	*Within a Budding Grove*
III. LE CÔTÉ DE GUERMANTES	*The Guermantes Way*

II

I. SODOME ET GOMORRHE	*Cities of the Plain*
II. LA PRISONNIÈRE	*The Captive*
III. ALBERTINE DISPARUE	*The Sweet Cheat Gone*
IV. LE TEMPS RETROUVÉ	*The Past Recaptured*

MARCEL PROUST

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

Swann's Way

Within a Budding Grove

The Guermantes Way

TRANSLATED BY C. K. SCOTT MONCRIEFF

VOLUME ONE

RANDOM HOUSE · NEW YORK

Copyright, 1934, by The Modern Library, Inc.

Copyright, 1924, 1925, by Thomas Seltzer

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED BY RANDOM HOUSE, INC.

Manufactured in The United States of America

Contents: VOLUME ONE

Introduction
BY JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH
PAGE VII

Swann's Way
PAGE 3

Within a Budding Grove
PAGE 331

The Guermantes Way
PAGE 719

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/bwb_C0-BYJ-199

Introduction

I

Marcel Proust was born in Paris on the tenth of July, 1871. At the age of nine he was suddenly stricken with an attack of asthma and from that time on he claimed the privileges of an invalid fortunately relieved by wealthy parents from the necessity of any concern with a livelihood. The doting father and mother watched over him with exaggerated care and developed in him a morbid affection. He attended school irregularly, passed the summer at the seaside, and amazed the parents of his childhood companions by the perfection of his behavior in the drawing room. Later on he abandoned the study of law at the Sorbonne for the career of valetudinarian and man-about-town, frequenting the best society and occasionally writing rather precious little essays for the aristocratic pages of *Figaro.*

As early as 1890 (when he was nineteen years old) he had also begun to take notes for an elaborate work which he was already projecting but none of his friends appears to have taken his literary pretension as anything more than the self-deception of a dilettante. He was universally liked because of a charm to which everyone who knew him has testified and because of a determination, carried to fantastic lengths, to do the considerate as well as the socially correct thing. He had not, however, written anything which displayed any conspicuous talent and it was not thought likely that he would. Then, in 1905, his mother died and he began that process of cutting himself more and more completely from the world which was to bring him at last to a strange self-imprisonment in the bedroom from which, after the most elaborate preparations, he only occasionally sallied forth in order to seek some bit of information from the head waiter at the Ritz or, as one lady remembers, to ask to see a hat worn some twenty years before.

From childhood Proust had regarded himself as primarily a spectator. There were many things which he could know only by watching, and this fact doubtless encouraged him to make watching an end in itself. Nevertheless, contemplation became something much more than merely a substitute for the activities he could not indulge. His theory was that the quality of a direct experience always eluded one and that only in recollection could we grasp its real flavor. Now that the death of his mother had severed the only tie which bound him to the life of the world, he retired in order that he might discover and record what his experience had been. Apparently he discussed with no one the nature of the work he was to write, but by 1906 the first seven hundred pages had been written and by 1913 *Swann's Way* had been published. Proust died in 1922, but the last volume of his work did not appear until 1927.

Even these few facts are sufficient to make it clear that *Remembrance of Things Past* is a life work in more than one sense. It was not only the thing upon which he depended to justify his assumption of the writer's role; it was also, and for himself, the real meaning of his life. So far as outward events are concerned the "I" of the novel is not exactly Proust, but the personalities of the two are identical and if the events are not copied from life they are intended to be a perfected equivalent of those experiences which he had or ought to have had in order to reach what he would have regarded as a perfect realization of his own potentialities. And what is true of himself is true of the other personages. They are all composites but composites carefully put together out of the most significant aspects of various real persons in such a fashion as to make each the complete realization of some ideal character towards which it seemed to him these various acquaintances were tending. Having come at last to reject completely that active participation in life which had never, in his case, been very full, he was determined to construct for himself out of memory and imagination a more than satisfactory substitute. That is what *Remembrance of Things Past* is.

One of the publishers to whom the first section, *Swann's Way,* was submitted sent it back with the words: "I cannot understand why a gentleman should employ thirty pages to describe how he turns and returns on his bed before going to sleep." Since that time many would-be readers have doubtless laid the volume down with a similar reflection but the loss has been theirs alone. Proust knew with uncommon exactness what it was he was about; he has a purpose in everything that he does, and even what appear to be digressions of inordinate length actually occupy a carefully proportioned and predetermined place in a structure whose architecture can only be understood when one stands off and regards it as a whole. The first rule for reading him is, therefore, complete submission to an author who will certainly take you where you ought to go and who will give you, not only vivid descriptions, subtle analyses, precise portraits and full participation in a strange new sensibility, but also compose all these things into a vast symphonic structure which is probably the most amazing thing of its kind in literature. Nevertheless the reader about to embark upon so long a journey will profit somewhat by having a general idea of the course before him. What, then is *Remembrance of Things Past* about?

II

The whole is cast into the form of an autobiography in which, nevertheless, the narrator himself plays a role not very much larger than that of certain other characters. It begins with his account of how he was accustomed to spend his sleepless nights in an effort to recapture the elusive memory of certain events in his childhood and it describes what some of these fragmentary memories were. Presently it tells how one of them was suddenly recaptured in its entirety when the taste of a little cake brought back a certain instance in childhood connected with the same taste and then, abandoning this incident until the last volume of the whole work, the narrator launches into the recollections of his youth. Gradually the tragic story of a certain Mr. Swann detaches itself and the history of his jealousy-wrecked life is told in full. Meanwhile the narrator has been growing up. He moves in aristocratic circles and becomes absorbed in the study of manners and their meaning. He falls in love, first with a whole group of girls, then, in succession, with two individuals in whose company he goes through strange emotional adventures. Meanwhile he meets many other persons whose lives cross his in one way or another and in particular he falls under the influence of the powerful M. de Charlus whose greatness and final downfall constitute perhaps the most impressive of all the single stories. Presently the social organization whose traditions he has been studying with such care disintegrates; he himself falls deeper and deeper into his illness and suddenly we realize that we are back again where we started. The author is ready to begin the writing of his book and we learn at last the real significance of the little cake. Through an extraordinary series of psychological adventures the past has been recaptured—not merely remembered but totally recalled and become, in the process, Art. The narrator no longer cares to live. He *has* lived and, what is more, he has grasped (and recorded) in its entirety the experience of living.

So much for the incidents. In what manner are they told and what qualities are revealed? These are questions which the reader will probably find himself answering in different ways as he becomes acquainted one after another with the extraordinary variety of Proust's powers. In the beginning he will find himself in a twilight world of extraordinary fascination and will be amazed at the precision with which Proust has recreated the world between sleep and waking. No sooner, however, has he had time to formulate this impression of Proust as a master of twilight psychology than he will find himself aware that characters and stories, remarkable now for their dramatic completeness, are emerging. Thus the story of Swann's love, brilliantly objective, forms a novel complete in itself and not yet perceived to be part of a larger pattern. A little further on, the narrator returns again to the experience of his boyhood; one is introduced to the aristocratic Guermantes; and one meets the group of bourgeois music lovers united under the leadership of the redoubtable Madame Verdurin. Faced with this extraordinary collection of vivid personages, one is tempted now to hold the opinion that it is as a creator of characters that Proust most conspicuously excels. One recognizes a whole gallery of grotesques—almost Dickens-like in the brilliance of the caricature—and later one will have to add many others, including even the fascinating but perverse M. de Charlus who is carried through his social triumphs, gradually allowed to disintegrate under our eyes, and then finally is exposed at his horribly comic nadir when he complains to the proprietor of a certain establishment where he has gone to have himself whipped by a milk boy, that the latter is insufficiently insulting. On the other hand, the greater part of four whole volumes in the original edition is devoted to the story of the narrator's love for Albertine and as one reads some of the passages of tortured self-analysis, one returns again to the idea that Proust is most remarkable in the description of subjective states, in following the involutions of his spirit and in communicating his egotistical absorption in the poignancy of a cherished pain.

Yet for all its variety there is unity in the work. Somehow all the characters and all the discourses go together. *Remembrance of Things Past* is no brilliant miscellany, for it achieves some single effect to which not only all the stories but also the revelation of Proust's strange personality contribute. No one could possibly be more detached than he and no one could have less of faith in anything. Indeed the story of the novel might with some justice be said to be the story of his disillusion with the only thing in which he made even an effort to believe—namely, that tradition of *noblesse oblige* which the members of the aristocracy ought to follow but which, so obviously, they do not. Yet the total effect is not one of chaos or of despair, because the work itself is beautiful even if the material which composes it is not, and in that fact lies the key to the secret. Proust's greatest invention was the invention of a form, of a method by means of which events could be arranged in a pattern having a formal beauty and a formal meaning capable of replacing the beauty and the meaning lost to those who, like himself, had no moral or religious faith capable of giving them any other kind.

Externally the method is one in which the normal chronological order of narrative is often subordinated to a quasi-musical arrangement of material by means of which similar or antithetical persons, situations and moods are rhythmically balanced against one another so as to create a pattern which does not depend upon the order of time but upon the sense of recurrence. At the same time every presentation of material is dominated by the author's obsession with Time and the need of the artist to escape from its tyranny. The past must be recovered; but that is not all. It must be made permanent, and it can become that only when grasped by the imagination in such a way that every moment implies the past and the future because its true significance lies in its being part of a pattern extending from the past into the future. Living experience cannot be fully significant because it is isolated and transitory; it becomes significant only when it is contemplated in connection with those parts of the pattern which Time separates but which really belong together. Let us, then, consider first the external aspects of the method and afterwards the end to which it is subservient.

III

Proust himself spoke of the various *themes* whose full significance would not be clear until, in the later volumes, they had begun to combine. This remark of his suggests the analogy with music, and one may begin the study of his method in some unit like the first volume, much as one might study the structure of a symphony by considering the first movement alone. Here one may commence by noting, for example, how the incident of his mother's failure to kiss him good night is first referred to on page ten, is dropped like a musical phrase, reappears successively on pages eighteen, twenty-one and twenty-seven, but does not receive its full development until the last volume when the narrator is standing in the anteroom of the Guermantes residence. Moreover this method is the one followed consistently throughout the book in which the themes play about one another like the motifs of a fugue. Each separate scene is related to others by the fact that some emotion or thought or observation recurs in each. The love affair with Gilberte is looking forward to a fuller development of the same themes in the love affair with Albertine and even the elaborate analysis of the process of forgetting the latter, which fills nearly a volume, is anticipated in the more summary tale of Gilberte by a few pages on that "irregular process of oblivion" which is destined to be later so elaborately developed.

The motifs appear one by one. It would be possible to go through the work and to note, as one would note in a symphony, that at this point or that each one of the themes—love, taste, manners, etc.—is introduced for the first time merely in passing before it is returned to again and again for more and more complete development. In *Swann's Way,* for example, the slight, apparently purposeless incident centering about the daughter of Vinteuil serves to suggest the theme of homosexuality later so elaborately treated and, though probably no reader who did not turn back would realize the fact, the very first pages of the whole work hint at most of the major themes. Thus the escape from Time is alluded to on page four where it is immediately followed by the incident of the magic lantern, which, as the first work of art introduced, serves to suggest the technique by which Time is to be transcended. One result of this arrangement is to make the novel in another respect like a piece of music, for of it may be said, more truly even than of most great novels, that the second reading is more rewarding than the first. To know what is coming does not detract from the pleasure—is indeed necessary to the full enjoyment of it—since each incident is, like a musical theme, only enriched by a knowledge of the variations to follow.

This original and perfected form has its own self-justifying beauties, but to consider the intention which determined its choice is to be led back again to that obsession with Time whose influence is discoverable in every detail of Proust's work. Thanks to the method which disregards chronology he was able to bring together, for purposes of contrast or comparison, widely separated periods, or, as he himself said, to show men as monstrous creatures straddling between the distant past and the present. Moreover it was necessary for his purpose to do just this because the full horror of Time had to be revealed in order that the miraculous joy which comes through the escape from it might be properly appreciated.

In the pages of the novel the commonplace fact that faces grow old and characters change becomes, for him, something to be analyzed with a fascinated terror. But this change in faces is only trivially important in comparison with that change which takes place in character. Hence it came at last to seem to him that it was folly to speak of Albertine, of Charlus, of himself even, as though any one of them were an entity maintaining its identity while time flowed past; and he realized that if his novel was to attain the full significance which he wished, it must manage somehow, not only to attain timelessness itself, but also to suggest the triumph of Time over the persons and the experiences which the novel alone could rescue.

Proust's problem as an artist was, then, the problem of finding the means of rescuing something from the flux, of establishing in the eternity of art the experiences which he had undergone or observed. But how was this to be accomplished? What was the bridge between the two realms? There was memory of course, and memory seems to the uninitiated the only enemy of Time. Through its aid the days that are passed may be recovered after a fashion. But memory collects rather than joins together, and what it gives us is a bag of detached and dissimilar fragments. The aggregate of them is the thing which we ordinarily call ourselves, but it remains only an aggregate, not a meaningful whole.

From the dilemma presented by the fact that memory reveals its impotence at the same time that it seems the only instrument we possess, Proust was rescued by an essentially mystical experience—by the discovery that for him there was possible a kind of memory not identical with the ordinary sort: a vision of the eternity in which even the most completely forgotten experience has already taken its place. Since this vision was mystical, it is, by very definition, not to be explained in any terms except its own; yet it cannot be repeated too often that in it lies the meaning of the novel, every detail of which it controls. And if we cannot analyze further a thing ultimate in its own nature, we can at least note the quality which it bestows, can at least ask how it determines the impression produced by the work which it dominates.

In the first place, it gives to *Remembrance of Things Past* that curiously detached and passionless character which the novel preserves even when passion is being so brilliantly described; it enables Proust to write a work so cool, so calm and so pure that its artistic perfection is never disturbed by anything which seems to arise in a mere human being whose impartiality can be disturbed as—occasionally at least—that of most writers is by the private passions or desires of a man.

In the second place, it furnishes him with his particular means of achieving an effect which every really great work of art must in some manner produce; it supplies him with a point of view from which even calamitous events can be seen as no longer actually painful. Always aware of the whole of which any incident is a part, he can, in his novel, calmly accept his own sufferings as well as the sufferings of others because it is the pattern of which they are a part, rather than either the pleasure or the pain of the moment, of which he is most acutely aware; and by thus seeing the passing events of time as part of a static eternity in which the end is simultaneous with the beginning, he achieves that indifference which is not the indifference of the insensitive but the indifference of the gods.

Events become, even as he recounts them, already a part of legend and thus life is magically transmuted into art. He himself, as well as M. Swann and M. de Charlus, are no longer mere human beings but analogous to the figures painted upon the slides of the little magic lantern which had fascinated him so long ago and which he had described at length early in the first volume of his work. The suffering and the wickedness of his own characters have now ceased to have any significance except as parts of a formal design; the first is no more painful and the second no more terrifying than the distress of Geneviève de Brabant or the wickedness of her implacable enemy Golo when these two, emerging as they were always ready to do from eternity, bodied themselves forth on the wall against which the beams of the lantern were directed.

IV

Very diverse opinions have been expressed concerning the rank which ought to be accorded to Proust as a novelist, but whatever other qualities he may or may not have, one can hardly deny him a freshness of vision which makes his novel very unlike any other. Whether narrating a series of events, describing a scene, or cataloguing the contents of the mind of a character at any moment, he is certain to select incidents, to set down particulars, and to list details which most would have omitted in favor of certain others now in their turn passed over by Proust. The result is the creation of a strange new world. Perhaps we recognize its elements even though we have not ever before been consciously aware of their existence; but the whole which they compose is new. We enter the pages of *Remembrance of Things Past* as we might enter a realm totally unfamiliar, and before we are aware of the fact we have closed a door behind us, forgetting the standards and the conventions of familiar life as completely as we forget its personages. For the world which the novel reveals is more than merely strange; it is also so consistent, so self-sustaining, and so logically complete that we are never by any reference led back to the other world of our ordinary concerns.

In contemporary literature we are far more accustomed to literary virtues of another sort. In the novels of a Sinclair Lewis or a Theodore Dreiser it is the closeness of their relation to everyday existence which strikes us most often. These novelists see what we ordinarily see, stress what we ordinarily stress, and judge as we ordinarily judge. One can, indeed, hardly distinguish the point at which reading leaves off and daily experience begins. The pages seem to merge into the stream of contemporary life and it is this fact which gives to them the kind of importance which they have. But it is this fact also which prevents us from doing what it is impossible not to do in the case of Proust—from, that is to say, entering a possible world entirely different from the one we know best and shutting the door behind us.

Moreover, it must be admitted that, quite aside from the delight afforded by the mere freshness involved, the spiritual world of Proust has elements of charm lacking in most contemporary novels because of the fact that the sensibility everywhere exhibited is of an extraordinary sort. He was disillusioned enough with many things—with morals, for example—and he had neither any code nor any standards besides those which his taste supplied. Yet in the midst of what might seem to be anarchy there were still capacities and faiths which he retained. He still believed, for example, in the sufficiency of the senses—at least as furnishers of the material which contemplation might transform. On the other hand, he never, like so many moderns, found himself in a universe limited and debased by the impossibility of escape from psychology, anthropology and Freudianism. The world was still absorbingly, still amazingly, interesting. Women—most women—were to him magical and mysterious. Conversations were witty, artists incalculably great. In a word, he respected his desires, his tastes and his amusements, and hence, though experience might be predominantly painful, it was neither meaningless nor mean. And that perhaps is the secret of the individual charm of his world. It is one viewed with the critical freedom of modern thought and one in which skepticism rules. Yet it is somehow glamorous as well.

No man was ever more completely than Proust a slave to sensations; no man ever lived more entirely by and for the nerves; but by shutting himself off from all but the memory of these sensations he not only recovered them with unexampled fullness but recovered them in a state more nearly pure than would have been possible for anyone who had a living future which could occupy him with plans and desires—recovered them, that is to say, unmixed either with his own personal concerns or with those moral fervors and antipathies which, for such at least as he, are in fact no part of a personal concern.

It cannot, of course, be denied that Proust's work fails to afford that "synthesis of modern life" which has been the subject of so much discussion or that, indeed, it fails even to treat the themes which the age seems to impose. Most of the novelists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries felt constrained to take life seriously in a sense that Proust does not, since, and with a clear conscience, he permits himself to live the charmed life of a dilettante, not troubling himself much about the fate of civilization, acting as though there were nothing more important than the careful discrimination between shades of feeling, and devoting himself with the selfishness of the contemplative saint to the achievement of his own private salvation. He does not hope to dominate or even to influence the civilization of which he is part, but instead—and again like the most other-worldly of monks—only to find some way of accepting the evil inevitably woven into the fabric of any life which takes place in time.

Is it not true, on the other hand, that the very critics who have found Proust insufficiently "modern" have also been demanding "form"; that they have grown weary of mere document and discussion; and that here in Proust's novel they are presented with one of the most perfect formal designs ever achieved by a writer of prose fiction? Is it not true, also, that he has been more successful than any other modern writer in finding a way of achieving order and peace for himself and his readers without removing them from modern life?

Remembrance of Things Past is Proust's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua,* and if the life which it defends seems to us a very odd one, at least the defense is successful and Proust in his novel has achieved certain qualities (like charm and order and peace) which seemed to have departed forever from modern literature. His world has definitely taken its place in the not very long list of those possible worlds which art creates; Charlus, Saint-Loup, the Duchesse de Guermantes, Françoise and Madame Verdurin have definitely taken their places in the not very long list of characters who are more real than reality. Something—both in the particular sense defined by Proust and in the more general sense in which the phrase is applicable to all great literature—has been rescued from Time. It is not often that that can be said.

Joseph Wood Krutch

Swann's Way

CONTENTS

	PAGE
OVERTURE	3
COMBRAY	37
SWANN IN LOVE	144
PLACE-NAMES: THE NAME	293

Swann's Way

OVERTURE

For a long time I used to go to bed early. Sometimes, when I had put out my candle, my eyes would close so quickly that I had not even time to say "I'm going to sleep." And half an hour later the thought that it was time to go to sleep would awaken me; I would try to put away the book which, I imagined, was still in my hands, and to blow out the light; I had been thinking all the time, while I was asleep, of what I had just been reading, but my thoughts had run into a channel of their own, until I myself seemed actually to have become the subject of my book: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between François I and Charles V. This impression would persist for some moments after I was awake; it did not disturb my mind, but it lay like scales upon my eyes and prevented them from registering the fact that the candle was no longer burning. Then it would begin to seem unintelligible, as the thoughts of a former existence must be to a reincarnate spirit; the subject of my book would separate itself from me, leaving me free to choose whether I would form part of it or no; and at the same time my sight would return and I would be astonished to find myself in a state of darkness, pleasant and restful enough for the eyes, and even more, perhaps, for my mind, to which it appeared incomprehensible, without a cause, a matter dark indeed.

I would ask myself what o'clock it could be; I could hear the whistling of trains, which, now nearer and now farther off, punctuating the distance like the note of a bird in a forest, shewed me in perspective the deserted countryside through which a traveller would be hurrying towards the nearest station: the path that he followed being fixed for ever in his memory by the general excitement due to being in a strange place, to doing unusual things, to the last words of conversation, to farewells exchanged beneath an unfamiliar lamp which echoed still in his ears amid the silence of the night; and to the delightful prospect of being once again at home.

I would lay my cheeks gently against the comfortable cheeks of my pillow, as plump and blooming as the cheeks of babyhood. Or I would strike a match to look at my watch. Nearly midnight. The hour when an invalid, who has been obliged to start on a journey and to sleep in a strange hotel, awakens in a moment of illness and sees with glad relief a streak of daylight shewing under his bedroom door. Oh, joy of joys! it is morning. The servants will be about in a minute: he can ring, and some one will come to look after him. The thought of being made comfortable gives him strength to endure his pain. He is certain he heard footsteps: they come nearer, and then die away. The ray of light beneath his door is extinguished. It is midnight; some one has turned out the gas; the last servant has gone to bed, and he must lie all night in agony with no one to bring him any help.

I would fall asleep, and often I would be awake again for short snatches only, just long enough to hear the regular creaking of the wainscot, or to open my eyes to settle the shifting kaleidoscope of the darkness, to savour, in an instantaneous flash of perception, the sleep which lay heavy upon the furniture, the room, the whole surroundings of which I formed but an insignificant part and whose unconsciousness I should very soon return to share. Or, perhaps, while I was asleep I had returned without the least effort to an earlier stage in my life, now for ever outgrown; and had come under the thrall of one of my childish terrors, such as that old terror of my great-uncle's pulling my curls, which was effectually dispelled on the day—the dawn of a new era to me—on which they were finally cropped from my head. I had forgotten that event during my sleep; I remembered it again immediately I had succeeded in making myself wake up to escape my great-uncle's fingers; still, as a measure of precaution, I would bury the whole of my head in the pillow before returning to the world of dreams.

Sometimes, too, just as Eve was created from a rib of Adam, so a woman would come into existence while I was sleeping, conceived from some strain in the position of my limbs. Formed by the appetite that I was on the point of gratifying, she it was, I imagined, who offered me that gratification. My body, conscious that its own warmth was permeating hers, would strive to become one with her, and I would awake. The rest of humanity seemed very remote in comparison with this woman whose company I had left but a moment ago: my cheek was still warm with her kiss, my body bent beneath the weight of hers. If, as would sometimes happen, she had the appearance of some woman whom I had known in waking hours, I would abandon myself altogether to the sole quest of her, like people who set out on a journey to see with their own eyes some city that they have always longed to visit, and imagine that they can taste in reality what has charmed their fancy. And then, gradually, the memory of her would dissolve and vanish, until I had forgotten the maiden of my dream.

When a man is asleep, he has in a circle round him the chain of the hours, the sequence of the years, the order of the heavenly host. Instinctively, when he awakes, he looks to these, and in an instant reads off his own position on the earth's surface and the amount of time that has elapsed during his slumbers; but this ordered procession is apt to grow confused, and to break its ranks. Suppose that, towards morning, after a night of insomnia, sleep descends upon him while he is reading, in quite a different position from that in which he normally goes to sleep, he has only to lift his arm to arrest the sun and turn it back in its course, and, at the moment of waking, he will have no idea of the time, but will conclude that he has just gone to bed. Or suppose that he gets drowsy in some even more abnormal position; sitting in an armchair, say, after dinner: then the world will fall topsy-turvy from its orbit, the magic chair will carry him at full speed through time and space, and when he opens his eyes again he will imagine that he went to sleep months earlier and in some far distant country. But for me it was enough if, in my own bed, my sleep was so heavy as completely to relax my consciousness; for then I lost all sense of the place in which I had gone to sleep, and when I awoke at midnight, not knowing where I was, I could not be sure at first who I was; I had only the most rudimentary sense of existence, such as may lurk and flicker in the depths of an animal's consciousness; I was more destitute of human qualities than the cave-dweller; but then the memory, not yet of the place in which I was, but of various other places where I had lived, and might now very possibly be, would come like a rope let down from heaven to draw me up out of the abyss of not-being, from which I could never have escaped by myself: in a flash I would traverse and surmount centuries of civilisation, and out of a half-visualised succession of oil-lamps, followed by shirts with turned-down collars, would put together by degrees the component parts of my ego.

Perhaps the immobility of the things that surround us is forced upon them by our conviction that they are themselves, and not anything else, and by the immobility of our conceptions of them. For it always happened that when I awoke like this, and my mind struggled in an unsuccessful attempt to discover where I was, everything would be moving round me through the darkness: things, places, years. My body, still too heavy with sleep to move, would make an effort to construe the form which its tiredness took as an orientation of its various members, so as to induce from that where the wall lay and the furniture stood, to piece together and to give a name to the house in which it must be living. Its memory, the composite memory of its ribs, knees, and shoulder-blades offered it a whole series of rooms in which it had at one time or another slept; while the unseen walls kept changing, adapting themselves to the shape of each successive room that it remembered, whirling madly through the darkness. And even before my brain, lingering in consideration of when things had happened and of what they had looked like, had collected sufficient impressions to enable it to identify the room, it, my body, would recall from each room in succession what the bed was like, where the doors were, how daylight came in at the windows, whether there was a passage outside, what I had had in my mind when I went to sleep, and had found there when I awoke. The stiffened side underneath my body would, for instance, in trying to fix its position, imagine itself to be lying, face to the wall, in a big bed with a canopy; and at once I would say to myself, "Why, I must have gone to sleep after all, and Mamma never came to say good night!" for I was in the country with my grandfather, who died years ago; and my body, the side upon which I was lying, loyally preserving from the past an impression which my mind should never have forgotten brought back before my eyes the glimmering flame of the night-light in its bowl of Bohemian glass, shaped like an urn and hung by chains from the ceiling, and the chimney-piece of Siena marble in my bedroom at Combray, in my great-aunt's house, in those far distant days which, at the moment of waking, seemed present without being clearly defined, but would become plainer in a little while when I was properly awake.

Then would come up the memory of a fresh position; the wall slid away in another direction; I was in my room in Mme. de Saint-Loup's house in the country; good heavens, it must be ten o'clock, they will have finished dinner! I must have overslept myself, in the little nap which I always take when I come in from my walk with Mme. de Saint-Loup, before dressing for the evening. For many years have now elapsed since the Combray days, when, coming in from the longest and latest walks, I would still be in time to see the reflection of the sunset glowing in the panes of my bedroom window. It is a very different kind of existence at Tansonville now with Mme. de Saint-Loup, and a different kind of pleasure that I now derive from taking walks only in the evenings, from visiting by moonlight the roads on which I used to play, as a child, in the sunshine; while the bedroom, in which I shall presently fall asleep instead of dressing for dinner, from afar off I can see it, as we return from our walk, with its lamp shining through the window, a solitary beacon in the night.

These shifting and confused gusts of memory never lasted for more than a few seconds; it often happened that, in my spell of uncertainty as to where I was, I did not distinguish the successive theories of which that uncertainty was composed any more than, when we watch a horse running, we isolate the successive positions of its body as they appear upon a bioscope. But I had seen first one and then another of the rooms in which I had slept during my life, and in the end I would revisit them all in the long course of my waking dream: rooms in winter, where on going to bed I would at once bury my head in a nest, built up out of the most diverse materials, the corner of my pillow, the top of my blankets, a piece of a shawl, the edge of my bed, and a copy of an evening paper, all of which things I would contrive, with the infinite patience of birds building their nests, to cement into one whole; rooms where, in a keen frost, I would feel the satisfaction of being shut in from the outer world (like the sea-swallow which builds at the end of a dark tunnel and is kept warm by the surrounding earth), and where, the fire keeping in all night, I would sleep wrapped up, as it were, in a great cloak of snug and savoury air, shot with the glow of the logs which would break out again in flame: in a sort of alcove without walls, a cave of warmth dug out of the heart of the room itself, a zone of heat whose boundaries were constantly shifting and altering in temperature as gusts of air ran across them to strike freshly upon my face, from the corners of the room, or from parts near the window or far from the fireplace which had therefore remained cold—or rooms in summer, where I would delight to feel myself a part of the warm evening, where the moonlight striking upon the half-opened shutters would throw down to the foot of my bed its enchanted ladder; where I would fall asleep, as it might be in the open air, like a titmouse which the breeze keeps poised in the focus of a sunbeam—or sometimes the Louis XVI room, so cheerful that I could never feel really unhappy, even on my first night in it: that room where the slender columns which lightly supported its ceiling would part, ever so gracefully, to indicate where the bed was and to keep it separate; sometimes again that little room with the high ceiling, hollowed in the form of a pyramid out of two separate storeys, and partly walled with mahogany, in which from the first moment my mind was drugged by the unfamiliar scent of flowering grasses, convinced of the hostility of the violet curtains and of the insolent indifference of a clock that chattered on at the top of its voice as though I were not there; while a strange and pitiless mirror with square feet, which stood across one corner of the room, cleared for itself a site I had not looked to find tenanted in the quiet surroundings of my normal field of vision: that room in which my mind, forcing itself for hours on end to leave its moorings, to elongate itself upwards so as to take on the exact shape of the room, and to reach to the summit of that monstrous funnel, had passed so many anxious nights while my body lay stretched out in bed, my eyes staring upwards, my ears straining, my nostrils sniffing uneasily, and my heart beating; until custom had changed the colour of the curtains, made the clock keep quiet, brought an expression of pity to the cruel, slanting face of the glass, disguised or even completely dispelled the scent of flowering grasses, and distinctly reduced the apparent loftiness of the ceiling. Custom! that skilful but unhurrying manager who begins by torturing the mind for weeks on end with her provisional arrangements; whom the mind, for all that, is fortunate in discovering, for without the help of custom it would never contrive, by its own efforts, to make any room seem habitable.

Certainly I was now well awake; my body had turned about for the last time and the good angel of certainty had made all the surrounding objects stand still, had set me down under my bedclothes, in my bedroom, and had fixed, approximately in their right places in the uncertain light, my chest of drawers, my writing-table, my fireplace, the window overlooking the street, and both the doors. But it was no good my knowing that I was not in any of those houses of which, in the stupid moment of waking, if I had not caught sight exactly, I could still believe in their possible presence; for memory was now set in motion; as a rule I did not attempt to go to sleep again at once, but used to spend the greater part of the night recalling our life in the old days at Combray with my great-aunt, at Balbec, Paris, Doncières, Venice, and the rest; remembering again all the places and people that I had known, what I had actually seen of them, and what others had told me.

At Combray, as every afternoon ended, long before the time when I should have to go up to bed, and to lie there, unsleeping, far from my mother and grandmother, my bedroom became the fixed point on which my melancholy and anxious thoughts were centred. Some one had had the happy idea of giving me, to distract me on evenings when I seemed abnormally wretched, a magic lantern, which used to be set on top of my lamp while we waited for dinner-time to come: in the manner of the master-builders and glass-painters of gothic days it substituted for the opaqueness of my walls an impalpable iridescence, supernatural phenomena of many colours, in which legends were depicted, as on a shifting and transitory window. But my sorrows were only increased, because this change of lighting destroyed, as nothing else could have done, the customary impression I had formed of my room, thanks to which the room itself, but for the torture of having to go to bed in it, had become quite endurable. For now I no longer recognised it, and I became uneasy, as though I were in a room in some hotel or furnished lodging, in a place where I had just arrived, by train, for the first time.

Riding at a jerky trot, Golo, his mind filled with an infamous design, issued from the little three-cornered forest which dyed dark-green the slope of a convenient hill, and advanced by leaps and bounds towards the castle of poor Geneviève de Brabant. This castle was cut off short by a curved line which was in fact the circumference of one of the transparent ovals in the slides which were pushed into position through a slot in the lantern. It was only the wing of a castle, and in front of it stretched a moor on which Geneviève stood, lost in contemplation, wearing a blue girdle. The castle and the moor were yellow, but I could tell their colour without waiting to see them, for before the slides made their appearance the old-gold sonorous name of Brabant had given me an unmistakable clue. Golo stopped for a moment and listened sadly to the little speech read aloud by my great-aunt, which he seemed perfectly to understand, for he modified his attitude with a docility not devoid of a degree of majesty, so as to conform to the indications given in the text; then he rode away at the same jerky trot. And nothing could arrest his slow progress. If the lantern were moved I could still distinguish Golo's horse advancing across the window-curtains, swelling out with their curves and diving into their folds. The body of Golo himself, being of the same supernatural substance as his steed's, overcame all material obstacles—everything that seemed to bar his way—by taking each as it might be a skeleton and embodying it in himself: the door-handle, for instance, over which, adapting itself at once, would float invincibly his red cloak or his pale face, never losing its nobility or its melancholy, never shewing any sign of trouble at such a transubstantiation.

And, indeed, I found plenty of charm in these bright projections, which seemed to have come straight out of a Merovingian past, and to shed around me the reflections of such ancient history. But I cannot express the discomfort I felt at such an intrusion of mystery and beauty into a room which I had succeeded in filling with my own personality until I thought no more of the room than of myself. The anaesthetic effect of custom being destroyed, I would begin to think and to feel very melancholy things. The door-handle of my room, which was different to me from all the other door-handles in the world, inasmuch as it seemed to open of its own accord and without my having to turn it, so unconscious had its manipulation become; lo and behold, it was now an astral body for Golo. And as soon as the dinner-bell rang I would run down to the dining-room, where the big hanging lamp, ignorant of Golo and Bluebeard but well acquainted with my family and the dish of stewed beef, shed the same light as on every other evening; and I would fall into the arms of my mother, whom the misfortunes of Geneviève de Brabant had made all the dearer to me, just as the crimes of Golo had driven me to a more than ordinarily scrupulous examination of my own conscience.

But after dinner, alas, I was soon obliged to leave Mamma, who stayed talking with the others, in the garden if it was fine, or in the little parlour where everyone took shelter when it was wet. Everyone except my grandmother, who held that "It is a pity to shut oneself indoors in the country," and used to carry on endless discussions with my father on the very wettest days, because he would send me up to my room with a book instead of letting me stay out of doors. "That is not the way to make him strong and active," she would say sadly, "especially this little man, who needs all the strength and character that he can get." My father would shrug his shoulders and study the barometer, for he took an interest in meteorology, while my mother, keeping very quiet so as not to disturb him, looked at him with tender respect, but not too hard, not wishing to penetrate the mysteries of his superior mind. But my grandmother, in all weathers, even when the rain was coming down in torrents and Françoise had rushed indoors with the precious wicker armchairs, so that they should not get soaked—you would see my grandmother pacing the deserted garden, lashed by the storm, pushing back her grey hair in disorder so that her brows might be more free to imbibe the life-giving draughts of wind and rain. She would say, "At last one can breathe!" and would run up and down the soaking paths—too straight and symmetrical for her liking, owing to the want of any feeling for nature in the new gardener, whom my father had been asking all morning if the weather were going to improve—with her keen, jerky little step regulated by the various effects wrought upon her soul by the intoxication of the storm, the force of hygiene, the stupidity of my education and of symmetry in gardens, rather than by any anxiety (for that was quite unknown to her) to save her plum-coloured skirt from the spots of mud under which it would gradually disappear to a depth which always provided her maid with a fresh problem and filled her with fresh despair.

When these walks of my grandmother's took place after dinner there was one thing which never failed to bring her back to the house: that was if (at one of those points when the revolutions of her course brought her, moth-like, in sight of the lamp in the little parlour where the liqueurs were set out on the card-table) my great-aunt called out to her: "Bathilde! Come in and stop your husband from drinking brandy!" For, simply to tease her (she had brought so foreign a type of mind into my father's family that everyone made a joke of it), my great-aunt used to make my grandfather, who was forbidden liqueurs, take just a few drops. My poor grandmother would come in and beg and implore her husband not to taste the brandy; and he would become annoyed and swallow his few drops all the same, and she would go out again sad and discouraged, but still smiling, for she was so humble and so sweet that her gentleness towards others, and her continual subordination of herself and of her own troubles, appeared on her face blended in a smile which, unlike those seen on the majority of human faces, had no trace in it of irony, save for herself, while for all of us kisses seemed to spring from her eyes, which could not look upon those she loved without yearning to bestow upon them passionate caresses. The torments inflicted on her by my great-aunt, the sight of my grandmother's vain entreaties, of her in her weakness conquered before she began, but still making the futile endeavour to wean my grandfather from his liqueur-glass—all these were things of the sort to which, in later years, one can grow so well accustomed as to smile at them, to take the tormentor's side with a happy determination which deludes one into the belief that it is not, really, tormenting; but in those days they filled me with such horror that I longed to strike my great-aunt. And yet, as soon as I heard her "Bathilde! Come in and stop your husband from drinking brandy!" in my cowardice I became at once a man, and did what all we grown men do when face to face with suffering and injustice; I preferred not to see them; I ran up to the top of the house to cry by myself in a little room beside the schoolroom and beneath the roof, which smelt of orris-root, and was scented also by a wild currant-bush which had climbed up between the stones of the outer wall and thrust a flowering branch in through the half-opened window. Intended for a more special and a baser use, this room, from which, in the daytime, I could see as far as the keep of Roussainville-le-Pin, was for a long time my place of refuge, doubtless because it was the only room whose door I was allowed to lock, whenever my occupation was such as required an inviolable solitude; reading or dreaming, secret tears or paroxysms of desire. Alas! I little knew that my own lack of will-power, my delicate health, and the consequent uncertainty as to my future weighed far more heavily on my grandmother's mind than any little breach of the rules by her husband, during those endless perambulations, afternoon and evening, in which we used to see passing up and down, obliquely raised towards the heavens, her handsome face with its brown and wrinkled cheeks, which with age had acquired almost the purple hue of tilled fields in autumn, covered, if she were walking abroad, by a half-lifted veil, while upon them either the cold or some sad reflection invariably left the drying traces of an involuntary tear.

My sole consolation when I went upstairs for the night was that Mamma would come in and kiss me after I was in bed. But this good night lasted for so short a time: she went down again so soon that the moment in which I heard her climb the stairs, and then caught the sound of her garden dress of blue muslin, from which hung little tassels of plaited straw, rustling along the double-doored corridor, was for me a moment of the keenest sorrow. So much did I love that good night that I reached the stage of hoping that it would come as late as possible, so as to prolong the time of respite during which Mamma would not yet have appeared. Sometimes when, after kissing me, she opened the door to go, I longed to call her back, to say to her "Kiss me just once again," but I knew that then she would at once look displeased, for the concession which she made to my wretchedness and agitation in coming up to me with this kiss of peace always annoyed my father, who thought such ceremonies absurd, and she would have liked to try to induce me to outgrow the need, the custom of having her there at all, which was a very different thing from letting the custom grow up of my asking her for an additional kiss when she was already crossing the threshold. And to see her look displeased destroyed all the sense of tranquillity she had brought me a moment before, when she bent her loving face down over my bed, and held it out to me like a Host, for an act of Communion in which my lips might drink deeply the sense of her real presence, and with it the power to sleep. But those evenings on which Mamma stayed so short a time in my room were sweet indeed compared to those on which we had guests to dinner, and therefore she did not come at all. Our 'guests' were practically limited to M. Swann, who, apart from a few passing strangers, was almost the only person who ever came to the house at Combray, sometimes to a neighbourly dinner (but less frequently since his unfortunate marriage, as my family did not care to receive his wife) and sometimes after dinner, uninvited. On those evenings when, as we sat in front of the house beneath the big chestnut-tree and round the iron table, we heard, from the far end of the garden, not the large and noisy rattle which heralded and deafened as he approached with its ferruginous, interminable, frozen sound any member of the household who had put it out of action by coming in 'without ringing,' but the double peal—timid, oval, gilded—of the visitors' bell, everyone would at once exclaim "A visitor! Who in the world can it be?" but they knew quite well that it could only be M. Swann. My great-aunt, speaking in a loud voice, to set an example, in a tone which she endeavoured to make sound natural, would tell the others not to whisper so; that nothing could be more unpleasant for a stranger coming in, who would be led to think that people were saying things about him which he was not meant to hear; and then my grandmother would be sent out as a scout, always happy to find an excuse for an additional turn in the garden, which she would utilise to remove surreptitiously, as she passed, the stakes of a rose-tree or two, so as to make the roses look a little more natural, as a mother might run her hand through her boy's hair, after the barber had smoothed it down, to make it stick out properly round his head.

And there we would all stay, hanging on the words which would fall from my grandmother's lips when she brought us back her report of the enemy, as though there had been some uncertainty among a vast number of possible invaders, and then, soon after, my grandfather would say: "I can hear Swann's voice." And, indeed, one could tell him only by his voice, for it was difficult to make out his face with its arched nose and green eyes, under a high forehead fringed with fair, almost red hair, dressed in the Bressant style, because in the garden we used as little light as possible, so as not to attract mosquitoes: and I would slip away as though not going for anything in particular, to tell them to bring out the syrups; for my grandmother made a great point, thinking it 'nicer,' of their not being allowed to seem anything out of the ordinary, which we kept for visitors only. Although a far younger man, M. Swann was very much attached to my grandfather, who had been an intimate friend, in his time, of Swann's father, an excellent but an eccentric man in whom the least little thing would, it seemed, often check the flow of his spirits and divert the current of his thoughts. Several times in the course of a year I would hear my grandfather tell at table the story, which never varied, of the behaviour of M. Swann the elder upon the death of his wife, by whose bedside he had watched day and night. My grandfather, who had not seen him for a long time, hastened to join him at the Swanns' family property on the outskirts of Combray, and managed to entice him for a moment, weeping profusely, out of the death-chamber, so that he should not be present when the body was laid in its coffin. They took a turn or two in the park, where there was a little sunshine. Suddenly M. Swann seized my grandfather by the arm and cried, "Oh, my dear old friend, how fortunate we are to be walking here together on such a charming day! Don't you see how pretty they are, all these trees—my hawthorns, and my new pond, on which you have never congratulated me? You look as glum as a night-cap. Don't you feel this little breeze? Ah! whatever you may say, it's good to be alive all the same, my dear Amédée!" And then, abruptly, the memory of his dead wife returned to him, and probably thinking it too complicated to inquire into how, at such a time, he could have allowed himself to be carried away by an impulse of happiness, he confined himself to a gesture which he habitually employed whenever any perplexing question came into his mind: that is, he passed his hand across his forehead, dried his eyes, and wiped his glasses. And he could never be consoled for the loss of his wife, but used to say to my grandfather, during the two years for which he survived her, "It's a funny thing, now; I very often think of my poor wife, but I cannot think of her very much at any one time." "Often, but a little at a time, like poor old Swann," became one of my grandfather's favourite phrases, which he would apply to all kinds of things. And I should have assumed that this father of Swann's had been a monster if my grandfather, whom I regarded as a better judge than myself, and whose word was my law and often led me in the long run to pardon offences which I should have been inclined to condemn, had not gone on to exclaim, "But, after all, he had a heart of gold."

For many years, albeit—and especially before his marriage—M. Swann the younger came often to see them at Combray, my great-aunt and grandparents never suspected that he had entirely ceased to live in the kind of society which his family had frequented, or that, under the sort of incognito which the name of Swann gave him among us, they were harbouring—with the complete innocence of a family of honest innkeepers who have in their midst some distinguished highwayman and never know it—one of the smartest members of the Jockey Club, a particular friend of the Comte de Paris and of the Prince of Wales, and one of the men most sought after in the aristocratic world of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

Our utter ignorance of the brilliant part which Swann was playing in the world of fashion was, of course, due in part to his own reserve and discretion; but also to the fact that middle-class people in those days took what was almost a Hindu view of society, which they held to consist of sharply defined castes, so that everyone at his birth found himself called to that station in life which his parents already occupied, and nothing, except the chance of a brilliant career or of a 'good' marriage, could extract you from that station or admit you to a superior caste. M. Swann, the father, had been a stockbroker; and so 'young Swann' found himself immured for life in a caste where one's fortune, as in a list of taxpayers, varied between such and such limits of income. We knew the people with whom his father had associated, and so we knew his own associates, the people with whom he was 'in a position to mix.' If he knew other people besides, those were youthful acquaintances on whom the old friends of the family, like my relatives, shut their eyes all the more good-naturedly that Swann himself, after he was left an orphan, still came most faithfully to see us; but we would have been ready to wager that the people outside our acquaintance whom Swann knew were of the sort to whom he would not have dared to raise his hat, had he met them while he was walking with ourselves. Had there been such a thing as a determination to apply to Swann a social coefficient peculiar to himself, as distinct from all the other sons of other stockbrokers in his father's position, his coefficient would have been rather lower than theirs, because, leading a very simple life, and having always had a craze for 'antiques' and pictures, he now lived and piled up his collections in an old house which my grandmother longed to visit, but which stood on the Quai d'Orléans, a neighbourhood in which my great-aunt thought it most degrading to be quartered. "Are you really a connoisseur, now?" she would say to him; "I ask for your own sake, as you are likely to have 'fakes' palmed off on you by the dealers," for she did not, in fact, endow him with any critical faculty, and had no great opinion of the intelligence of a man who, in conversation, would avoid serious topics and shewed a very dull preciseness, not only when he gave us kitchen recipes, going into the most minute details, but even when my grandmother's sisters were talking to him about art. When challenged by them to give an opinion, or to express his admiration for some picture, he would remain almost impolitely silent, and would then make amends by furnishing (if he could) some fact or other about the gallery in which the picture was hung, or the date at which it had been painted. But as a rule he would content himself with trying to amuse us by telling us the story of his latest adventure—and he would have a fresh story for us on every occasion—with some one whom we ourselves knew, such as the Combray chemist, or our cook, or our coachman. These stories certainly used to make my great-aunt laugh, but she could never tell whether that was on account of the absurd parts which Swann invariably made himself play in the adventures, or of the wit that he shewed in telling us of them. "It is easy to see that you are a regular 'character,' M. Swann!"

As she was the only member of our family who could be described as a trifle 'common,' she would always take care to remark to strangers, when Swann was mentioned, that he could easily, if he had wished to, have lived in the Boulevard Haussmann or the Avenue de l'Opéra, and that he was the son of old M. Swann who must have left four or five million francs, but that it was a fad of his. A fad which, moreover, she thought was bound to amuse other people so much that in Paris, when M. Swann called on New Year's Day bringing her a little packet of *marrons glacés*, she never failed, if there were strangers in the room, to say to him: "Well, M. Swann, and do you still live next door to the Bonded Vaults, so as to be sure of not missing your train when you go to Lyons?" and she would peep out of the corner of her eye, over her glasses, at the other visitors.

But if anyone had suggested to my aunt that this Swann, who, in his capacity as the son of old M. Swann, was 'fully qualified' to be received by any of the 'upper middle class,' the most respected barristers and solicitors of Paris (though he was perhaps a trifle inclined to let this hereditary privilege go into abeyance), had another almost secret existence of a wholly different kind: that when he left our house in Paris, saying that he must go home to bed, he would no sooner have turned the corner than he would stop, retrace his steps, and be off to some drawing-room on whose like no stockbroker or associate of stockbrokers had ever set eyes—that would have seemed to my aunt as extraordinary as, to a woman of wider reading, the thought of being herself on terms of intimacy with Aristaeus, of knowing that he would, when he had finished his conversation with her, plunge deep into the realms of Thetis, into an empire veiled from mortal eyes, in which Virgil depicts him as being received with open arms; or—to be content with an image more likely to have occurred to her, for she had seen it painted on the plates we used for biscuits at Combray—as the thought of having had to dinner Ali Baba, who, as soon as he found himself alone and unobserved, would make his way into the cave, resplendent with its unsuspected treasures.

One day when he had come to see us after dinner in Paris, and had begged pardon for being in evening clothes, Françoise, when he had gone, told us that she had got it from his coachman that he had been dining "with a princess." "A pretty sort of princess," drawled my aunt; "I know them," and she shrugged her shoulders without raising her eyes from her knitting, serenely ironical.

Altogether, my aunt used to treat him with scant ceremony. Since she was of the opinion that he ought to feel flattered by our invitations, she thought it only right and proper that he should never come to see us in summer without a basket of peaches or raspberries from his garden, and that from each of his visits to Italy he should bring back some photographs of old masters for me.

It seemed quite natural, therefore, to send to him whenever we wanted a recipe for some special sauce or for a pineapple salad for one of our big dinner-parties, to which he himself would not be invited, not seeming of sufficient importance to be served up to new friends who might be in our house for the first time. If the conversation turned upon the Princes of the House of France, "Gentlemen, you and I will never know, will we, and don't want to, do we?" my great-aunt would say tartly to Swann, who had, perhaps, a letter from Twickenham in his pocket; she would make him play accompaniments and turn over music on evenings when my grandmother's sister sang; manipulating this creature, so rare and refined at other times and in other places, with the rough simplicity of a child who will play with some curio from the cabinet no more carefully than if it were a penny toy. Certainly the Swann who was a familiar figure in all the clubs of those days differed hugely from the Swann created in my great-aunt's mind when, of an evening, in our little garden at Combray, after the two shy peals had sounded from the gate, she would vitalise, by injecting into it everything she had ever heard about the Swann family, the vague and unrecognisable shape which began to appear, with my grandmother in its wake, against a background of shadows, and could at last be identified by the sound of its voice. But then, even in the most insignificant details of our daily life, none of us can be said to constitute a material whole, which is identical for everyone, and need only be turned up like a page in an account-book or the record of a will; our social personality is created by the thoughts of other people. Even the simple act which we describe as "seeing some one we know" is, to some extent, an intellectual process. We pack the physical outline of the creature we see with all the ideas we have already formed about him, and in the complete picture of him which we compose in our minds those ideas have certainly the principal place. In the end they come to fill out so completely the curve of his cheeks, to follow so exactly the line of his nose, they blend so harmoniously in the sound of his voice that these seem to be no more than a transparent envelope, so that each time we see the face or hear the voice it is our own ideas of him which we recognise and to which we listen. And so, no doubt, from the Swann they had built up for their own purposes my family had left out, in their ignorance, a whole crowd of the details of his daily life in the world of fashion, details by means of which other people, when they met him, saw all the Graces enthroned in his face and stopping at the line of his arched nose as at a natural frontier; but they contrived also to put into a face from which its distinction had been evicted, a face vacant and roomy as an untenanted house, to plant in the depths of its unvalued eyes a lingering sense, uncertain but not unpleasing, half-memory and half-oblivion, of idle hours spent together after our weekly dinners, round the card-table or in the garden, during our companionable country life. Our friend's bodily frame had been so well lined with this sense, and with various earlier memories of his family, that their own special Swann had become to my people a complete and living creature; so that even now I have the feeling of leaving some one I know for another quite different person when, going back in memory, I pass from the Swann whom I knew later and more intimately to this early Swann—this early Swann in whom I can distinguish the charming mistakes of my childhood, and who, incidentally, is less like his successor than he is like the other people I knew at that time, as though one's life were a series of galleries in which all the portraits of any one period had a marked family likeness, the same (so to speak) tonality—this early Swann abounding in leisure, fragrant with the scent of the great chestnut-tree, of baskets of raspberries and of a sprig of tarragon.

And yet one day, when my grandmother had gone to ask some favour of a lady whom she had known at the Sacré Cœur (and with whom, because of our caste theory, she had not cared to keep up any degree of intimacy in spite of several common interests), the Marquise de Villeparisis, of the famous house of Bouillon, this lady had said to her:

"I think you know M. Swann very well; he is a great friend of my nephews, the des Laumes."

My grandmother had returned from the call full of praise for the house, which overlooked some gardens, and in which Mme. de Villeparisis had advised her to rent a flat; and also for a repairing tailor and his daughter, who kept a little shop in the courtyard, into which she had gone to ask them to put a stitch in her skirt, which she had torn on the staircase. My grandmother had found these people perfectly charming: the girl, she said, was a jewel, and the tailor a most distinguished man, the finest she had ever seen. For in her eyes distinction was a thing wholly independent of social position. She was in ecstasies over some answer the tailor had made, saying to Mamma:

"Sévigné would not have said it better!" and, by way of contrast, of a nephew of Mme. de Villeparisis whom she had met at the house:

"My dear, he is so common!"

Now, the effect of that remark about Swann had been, not to raise him in my great-aunt's estimation, but to lower Mme. de Villeparisis. It appeared that the deference which, on my grandmother's authority, we owed to Mme. de Villeparisis imposed on her the reciprocal obligation to do nothing that would render her less worthy of our regard, and that she had failed in her duty in becoming aware of Swann's existence and in allowing members of her family to associate with him. "How should she know Swann? A lady who, you always made out, was related to Marshal MacMahon!" This view of Swann's social atmosphere which prevailed in my family seemed to be confirmed later on by his marriage with a woman of the worst class, you might almost say a 'fast' woman, whom, to do him justice, he never attempted to introduce to us, for he continued to come to us alone, though he came more and more seldom; but from whom they thought they could establish, on the assumption that he had found her there, the circle, unknown to them, in which he ordinarily moved.

But on one occasion my grandfather read in a newspaper that M. Swann was one of the most faithful attendants at the Sunday luncheons given by the Duc de X———, whose father and uncle had been among our most prominent statesmen in the reign of Louis Philippe. Now my grandfather was curious to learn all the little details which might help him to take a mental share in the private lives of men like Molé, the Duc Pasquier, or the Duc de Broglie. He was delighted to find that Swann associated with people who had known them. My great-aunt, however, interpreted this piece of news in a sense discreditable to Swann; for anyone who chose his associates outside the caste in which he had been born and bred, outside his 'proper station,' was condemned to utter degradation in her eyes. It seemed to her that such a one abdicated all claim to enjoy the fruits of those friendly relations with people of good position which prudent parents cultivate and store up for their children's benefit, for my great-aunt had actually ceased to 'see' the son of a lawyer we had known because he had married a 'Highness' and had thereby stepped down—in her eyes—from the respectable position of a lawyer's son to that of those adventurers, upstart footmen or stable-boys mostly, to whom we read that queens have sometimes shewn their favours. She objected, therefore, to my grandfather's plan of questioning Swann, when next he came to dine with us, about these people whose friendship with him we had discovered. On the other hand, my grandmother's two sisters, elderly spinsters who shared her nobility of character but lacked her intelligence, declared that they could not conceive what pleasure their brother-in-law could find in talking about such trifles. They were ladies of lofty ambition, who for that reason were incapable of taking the least interest in what might be called the 'pinchbeck' things of life, even when they had an historic value, or, generally speaking, in anything that was not directly associated with some object aesthetically precious. So complete was their negation of interest in anything which seemed directly or indirectly a part of our everyday life that their sense of hearing—which had gradually come to understand its own futility when the tone of the conversation, at the dinner-table, became frivolous or merely mundane, without the two old ladies' being able to guide it back to the topic dear to themselves—would leave its receptive channels unemployed, so effectively that they were actually becoming atrophied. So that if my grandfather wished to attract the attention of the two sisters, he would have to make use of some such alarm signals as mad-doctors adopt in dealing with their distracted patients; as by beating several times on a glass with the blade of a knife, fixing them at the same time with a sharp word and a compelling glance, violent methods which the said doctors are apt to bring with them into their everyday life among the sane, either from force of professional habit or because they think the whole world a trifle mad.

Their interest grew, however, when, the day before Swann was to dine with us, and when he had made them a special present of a case of Asti, my great-aunt, who had in her hand a copy of the *Figaro* in which to the name of a picture then on view in a Corot exhibition were added the words, "from the collection of M. Charles Swann," asked: "Did you see that Swann is 'mentioned' in the *Figaro*?"

"But I have always told you," said my grandmother, "that he had plenty of taste."

"You would, of course," retorted my great-aunt, "say anything just to seem different from *us*." For, knowing that my grandmother never agreed with her, and not being quite confident that it was her own opinion which the rest of us invariably endorsed, she wished to extort from us a wholesale condemnation of my grandmother's views, against which she hoped to force us into solidarity with her own.

But we sat silent. My grandmother's sisters having expressed a desire to mention to Swann this reference to him in the *Figaro*, my great-aunt dissuaded them. Whenever she saw in others an advantage, however trivial, which she herself lacked, she would persuade herself that it was no advantage at all, but a drawback, and would pity so as not to have to envy them.

"I don't think that would please him at all; I know very well, I should hate to see my name printed like that, as large as life, in the paper, and I shouldn't feel at all flattered if anyone spoke to me about it."

She did not, however, put any very great pressure upon my grandmother's sisters, for they, in their horror of vulgarity, had brought to such a fine art the concealment of a personal allusion in a wealth of ingenious circumlocution, that it would often pass unnoticed even by the person to whom it was addressed. As for my mother, her only thought was of managing to induce my father to consent to speak to Swann, not of his wife, but of his daughter, whom he worshipped, and for whose sake it was understood that he had ultimately made his unfortunate marriage.

"You need only say a word; just ask him how she is. It must be so very hard for him."

My father, however, was annoyed: "No, no; you have the most absurd ideas. It would be utterly ridiculous."

But the only one of us in whom the prospect of Swann's arrival gave rise to an unhappy foreboding was myself. And that was because on the evenings when there were visitors, or just M. Swann in the house, Mamma did not come up to my room. I did not, at that time, have dinner with the family: I came out to the garden after dinner, and at nine I said good night and went to bed. But on these evenings I used to dine earlier than the others, and to come in afterwards and sit at table until eight o'clock, when it was understood that I must go upstairs; that frail and precious kiss which Mamma used always to leave upon my lips when I was in bed and just going to sleep I had to take with me from the dining-room to my own, and to keep inviolate all the time that it took me to undress, without letting its sweet charm be broken, without letting its volatile essence diffuse itself and evaporate; and just on those very evenings when I must needs take most pains to receive it with due formality, I had to snatch it, to seize it instantly and in public, without even having the time or being properly free to apply to what I was doing the punctiliousness which madmen use who compel themselves to exclude all other thoughts from their minds while they are shutting a door, so that when the sickness of uncertainty sweeps over them again they can triumphantly face and overcome it with the recollection of the precise moment in which the door was shut.

We were all in the garden when the double peal of the gate-bell sounded shyly. Everyone knew that it must be Swann, and yet they looked at one another inquiringly and sent my grandmother scouting.

"See that you thank him intelligibly for the wine," my grandfather warned his two sisters-in-law; "you know how good it is, and it is a huge case."

"Now, don't start whispering!" said my great-aunt. "How would you like to come into a house and find everyone muttering to themselves?"

"Ah! There's M. Swann," cried my father. "Let's ask him if he thinks it will be fine to-morrow."

My mother fancied that a word from her would wipe out all the unpleasantness which my family had contrived to make Swann feel since his marriage. She found an opportunity to draw him aside for a moment. But I followed her: I could not bring myself to let her go out of reach of me while I felt that in a few minutes I should have to leave her in the dining-room and go up to my bed without the consoling thought, as on ordinary evenings, that she would come up, later, to kiss me.

"Now, M. Swann," she said, "do tell me about your daughter; I am sure she shews a taste already for nice things, like her papa."

"Come along and sit down here with us all on the verandah," said my grandfather, coming up to him. My mother had to abandon the quest, but managed to extract from the restriction itself a further refinement of thought, as great poets do when the tyranny of rhyme forces them into the discovery of their finest lines.

"We can talk about her again when we are by ourselves," she said, or rather whispered to Swann. "It is only a mother who can understand. I am sure that hers would agree with me."

And so we all sat down round the iron table. I should have liked not to think of the hours of anguish which I should have to spend, that evening, alone in my room, without the possibility of going to sleep: I tried to convince myself that they were of no importance, really, since I should have forgotten them next morning, and to fix my mind on thoughts of the future which would carry me, as on a bridge, across the terrifying abyss that yawned at my feet. But my mind, strained by this foreboding, distended like the look which I shot at my mother, would not allow any other impression to enter. Thoughts did, indeed, enter it, but only on the condition that they left behind them every element of beauty, or even of quaintness, by which I might have been distracted or beguiled. As a surgical patient, by means of a local anaesthetic, can look on with a clear consciousness while an operation is being performed upon him and yet feel nothing, I could repeat to myself some favourite lines, or watch my grandfather attempting to talk to Swann about the Duc d'Audriffet-Pasquier, without being able to kindle any emotion from one or amusement from the other. Hardly had my grandfather begun to question Swann about that orator when one of my grandmother's sisters, in whose ears the question echoed like a solemn but untimely silence which her natural politeness bade her interrupt, addressed the other with:

"Just fancy, Flora, I met a young Swedish governess to-day who told me some most interesting things about the co-operative movement in Scandinavia. We really must have her to dine here one evening."

"To be sure!" said her sister Flora, "but I haven't wasted my time either. I met such a clever old gentleman at M. Vinteuil's who knows Maubant quite well, and Maubant has told him every little thing about how he gets up his parts. It is the most interesting thing I ever heard. He is a neighbour of M. Vinteuil's, and I never knew; and he is so nice besides."

"M. Vinteuil is not the only one who has nice neighbours," cried my aunt Céline in a voice which seemed loud because she was so timid, and seemed forced because she had been planning the little speech for so long; darting, as she spoke, what she called a 'significant glance' at Swann. And my aunt Flora, who realised that this veiled utterance was Céline's way of thanking Swann intelligibly for the Asti, looked at him with a blend of congratulation and irony, either just because she wished to underline her sister's little epigram, or because she envied Swann his having inspired it, or merely because she imagined that he was embarrassed, and could not help having a little fun at his expense.

"I think it would be worth while," Flora went on, "to have this old gentleman to dinner. When you get him upon Maubant or Mme. Materna he will talk for hours on end."

"That must be delightful," sighed my grandfather, in whose mind nature had unfortunately forgotten to include any capacity whatsoever for becoming passionately interested in the co-operative movement among the ladies of Sweden or in the methods employed by Maubant to get up his parts, just as it had forgotten to endow my grandmother's two sisters with a grain of that precious salt which one has oneself to 'add to taste' in order to extract any savour from a narrative of the private life of Molé or of the Comte de Paris.

"I say!" exclaimed Swann to my grandfather, "what I was going to tell you has more to do than you might think with what you were asking me just now, for in some respects there has been very little change. I came across a passage in Saint-Simon this morning which would have amused you. It is in the volume which covers his mission to Spain; not one of the best, little more in fact than a journal, but at least it is a journal wonderfully well written, which fairly distinguishes it from the devastating journalism that we feel bound to read in these days, morning, noon and night."

"I do not agree with you: there are some days when I find reading the papers very pleasant indeed!" my aunt Flora broke in, to show Swann that she had read the note about his Corot in the *Figaro*.

"Yes," aunt Céline went one better. "When they write about things or people in whom we are interested."

"I don't deny it," answered Swann in some bewilderment. "The fault I find with our journalism is that it forces us to take an interest in some fresh triviality or other every day, whereas only three or four books in a lifetime give us anything that is of real importance. Suppose that, every morning, when we tore the wrapper off our paper with fevered hands, a transmutation were to take place, and we were to find inside it—oh! I don't know; shall we say Pascal's *Pensées*?" He articulated the title with an ironic emphasis so as not to appear pedantic. "And then, in the gilt and tooled volumes which we open once in ten years," he went on, shewing that contempt for the things of this world which some men of the world like to affect, "we should read that the Queen of the Hellenes had arrived at Cannes, or that the Princesse de Léon had given a fancy dress ball. In that way we should arrive at the right proportion between 'information' and 'publicity.'" But at once regretting that he had allowed himself to speak, even in jest, of serious matters, he added ironically: "We are having a most entertaining conversation; I cannot think why we climb to these lofty summits," and then, turning to my grandfather: "Well, Saint-Simon tells how Maulevrier had had the audacity to offer his hand to his sons. You remember how he says of Maulevrier, 'Never did I find in that coarse bottle anything but ill-humour, boorishness, and folly.'"

"Coarse or not, I know bottles in which there is something very different!" said Flora briskly, feeling bound to thank Swann as well as her sister, since the present of Asti had been addressed to them both. Céline began to laugh.

Swann was puzzled, but went on: " 'I cannot say whether it was his ignorance or a trap,' writes Saint-Simon; 'he wished to give his hand to my children. I noticed it in time to prevent him.' "

My grandfather was already in ecstasies over "ignorance or a trap," but Miss Céline—the name of Saint-Simon, a 'man of letters,' having arrested the complete paralysis of her sense of hearing—had grown angry.

"What! You admire that, do you? Well, it is clever enough! But what is the point of it? Does he mean that one man isn't as good as another? What difference can it make whether he is a duke or a groom so long as he is intelligent and good? He had a fine way of bringing up his children, your Saint-Simon, if he didn't teach them to shake hands with all honest men. Really and truly, it's abominable. And you dare to quote it!"

And my grandfather, utterly depressed, realising how futile it would be for him, against this opposition, to attempt to get Swann to tell him the stories which would have amused him, murmured to my mother: "Just tell me again that line of yours which always comforts me so much on these occasions. Oh, yes:

What virtues, Lord, Thou makest us abhor!

Good, that is, very good."

I never took my eyes off my mother. I knew that when they were at table I should not be permitted to stay there for the whole of dinner-time, and that Mamma, for fear of annoying my father, would not allow me to give her in public the series of kisses that she would have had in my room. And so I promised myself that in the dining-room, as they began to eat and drink and as I felt the hour approach, I would put beforehand into this kiss, which was bound to be so brief and stealthy in execution, everything that my own efforts could put into it: would look out very carefully first the exact spot on her cheek where I would imprint it, and would so prepare my thoughts that I might be able, thanks to these mental preliminaries, to consecrate the whole of the minute Mamma would allow me to the sensation of her cheek against my lips, as a painter who can have his subject for short sittings only prepares his palette, and from what he remembers and from rough notes does in advance everything which he possibly can do in the sitter's absence. But to-night, before the dinner-bell had sounded, my grandfather said with unconscious cruelty: "The little man looks tired; he'd better go up to bed. Besides, we are dining late to-night."

And my father, who was less scrupulous than my grandmother or mother in observing the letter of a treaty, went on: "Yes, run along; to bed with you."

I would have kissed Mamma then and there, but at that moment the dinner-bell rang.

"No, no, leave your mother alone. You've said good night quite enough. These exhibitions are absurd. Go on upstairs."

And so I must set forth without viaticum; must climb each step of the staircase 'against my heart,' as the saying is, climbing in opposition to my heart's desire, which was to return to my mother, since she had not, by her kiss, given my heart leave to accompany me forth. That hateful staircase, up which I always passed with such dismay, gave out a smell of varnish which had to some extent absorbed, made definite and fixed the special quality of sorrow that I felt each evening, and made it perhaps even more cruel to my sensibility because, when it assumed this olfactory guise, my intellect was powerless to resist it. When we have gone to sleep with a maddening toothache and are conscious of it only as a little girl whom we attempt, time after time, to pull out of the water, or as a line of Molière which we repeat incessantly to ourselves, it is a great relief to wake up, so that our intelligence can disentangle the idea of toothache from any artificial semblance of heroism or rhythmic cadence. It was the precise converse of this relief which I felt when my anguish at having to go up to my room invaded my consciousness in a manner infinitely more rapid, instantaneous almost, a manner at once insidious and brutal as I breathed in —a far more poisonous thing than any moral penetration—the peculiar smell of the varnish upon that staircase.

Once in my room I had to stop every loophole, to close the shutters, to dig my own grave as I turned down the bed-clothes, to wrap myself in the shroud of my nightshirt. But before burying myself in the iron bed which had been placed there because, on summer nights, I was too hot among the rep curtains of the four-poster, I was stirred to revolt, and attempted the desperate stratagem of a condemned prisoner. I wrote to my mother begging her to come upstairs for an important reason which I could not put in writing. My fear was that Françoise, my aunt's cook who used to be put in charge of me when I was at Combray, might refuse to take my note. I had a suspicion that, in her eyes, to carry a message to my mother when there was a stranger in the room would appear flatly inconceivable, just as it would be for the door-keeper of a theatre to hand a letter to an actor upon the stage. For things which might or might not be done she possessed a code at once imperious, abundant, subtle, and uncompromising on points themselves imperceptible or irrelevant, which gave it a resemblance to those ancient laws which combine such cruel ordinances as the massacre of infants at the breast with prohibitions, of exaggerated refinement, against "seething the kid in his mother's milk," or "eating of the sinew which is upon the hollow of the thigh." This code, if one could judge it by the sudden obstinacy which she would put into her refusal to carry out certain of our instructions, seemed to have foreseen such social complications and refinements of fashion as nothing in Françoise's surroundings or in her career as a servant in a village household could have put into her head; and we were obliged to assume that there was latent in her some past existence in the ancient history of France, noble and little understood, just as there is in those manufacturing towns where old mansions still testify to their former courtly days, and chemical workers toil among delicately sculptured scenes of the Miracle of Theophilus or the Quatre Fils Aymon.

In this particular instance, the article of her code which made it highly improbable that—barring an outbreak of fire—Françoise would go down and disturb Mamma when M. Swann was there for so unimportant a person as myself was one embodying the respect she shewed not only for the family (as for the dead, for the clergy, or for royalty), but also for the stranger within our gates; a respect which I should perhaps have found touching in a book, but which never failed to irritate me on her lips, because of the solemn and gentle tones in which she would utter it, and which irritated me more than usual this evening when the sacred character in which she invested the dinner-party might have the effect of making her decline to disturb its ceremonial. But to give myself one chance of success I lied without hesitation, telling her that it was not in the least myself who had wanted to write to Mamma, but Mamma who, on saying good night to me, had begged me not to forget to send her an answer about something she had asked me to find, and that she would certainly be very angry if this note were not taken to her. I think that Françoise disbelieved me, for, like those primitive men whose senses were so much keener than our own, she could immediately detect, by signs imperceptible by the rest of us, the truth or falsehood of anything that we might wish to conceal from her. She studied the envelope for five minutes as though an examination of the paper itself and the look of my handwriting could enlighten her as to the nature of the contents, or tell her to which article of her code she ought to refer the matter. Then she went out with an air of resignation which seemed to imply: "What a dreadful thing for parents to have a child like this!"

A moment later she returned to say that they were still at the ice stage and that it was impossible for the butler to deliver the note at once, in front of everybody; but that when the finger-bowls were put round he would find a way of slipping it into Mamma's hand. At once my anxiety subsided; it was now no longer (as it had been a moment ago) until to-morrow that I had lost my mother, for my little line was going—to annoy her, no doubt, and doubly so because this contrivance would make me ridiculous in Swann's eyes—but was going all the same to admit me, invisibly and by stealth, into the same room as herself, was going to whisper from me into her ear; for that forbidden and unfriendly dining-room, where but a moment ago the ice itself—with burned nuts in it—and the finger-bowls seemed to me to be concealing pleasures that were mischievous and of a mortal sadness because Mamma was tasting of them and I was far away, had opened its doors to me and, like a ripe fruit which bursts through its skin, was going to pour out into my intoxicated heart the gushing sweetness of Mamma's attention while she was reading what I had written. Now I was no longer separated from her; the barriers were down; an exquisite thread was binding us. Besides, that was not all, for surely Mamma would come.

As for the agony through which I had just passed, I imagined that Swann would have laughed heartily at it if he had read my letter and had guessed its purpose; whereas, on the contrary, as I was to learn in due course, a similar anguish had been the bane of his life for many years, and no one perhaps could have understood my feelings at that moment so well as himself; to him, that anguish which lies in knowing that the creature one adores is in some place of enjoyment where oneself is not and cannot follow—to him that anguish came through Love, to which it is in a sense predestined, by which it must be equipped and adapted; but when, as had befallen me, such an anguish possesses one's soul before Love has yet entered into one's life, then it must drift, awaiting Love's coming, vague and free, without precise attachment, at the disposal of one sentiment to-day, of another to-morrow, of filial piety or affection for a comrade. And the joy with which I first bound myself apprentice, when Françoise returned to tell me that my letter would be delivered; Swann, too, had known well that false joy which a friend can give us, or some relative of the woman we love, when on his arrival at the house or theatre where she is to be found, for some ball or party or 'first-night' at which he is to meet her, he sees us wandering outside, desperately awaiting some opportunity of communicating with her. He recognises us, greets us familiarly, and asks what we are doing there. And when we invent a story of having some urgent message to give to his relative or friend, he assures us that nothing could be more simple, takes us in at the door, and promises to send her down to us in five minutes. How much we love him—as at that moment I loved Françoise—the good-natured intermediary who by a single word has made supportable, human, almost propitious the inconceivable, infernal scene of gaiety in the thick of which we had been imagining swarms of enemies, perverse and seductive, beguiling away from us, even making laugh at us, the woman whom we love. If we are to judge of them by him, this relative who has accosted us and who is himself an initiate in those cruel mysteries, then the other guests cannot be so very demoniacal. Those inaccessible and torturing hours into which she had gone to taste of unknown pleasures—behold, a breach in the wall, and we are through it. Behold, one of the moments whose series will go to make up their sum, a moment as genuine as the rest, if not actually more important to ourself because our mistress is more intensely a part of it; we picture it to ourselves, we possess it, we intervene upon it, almost we have created it: namely, the moment in which he goes to tell her that we are waiting there below. And very probably the other moments of the party will not be essentially different, will contain nothing else so exquisite or so well able to make us suffer, since this kind friend has assured us that "Of course, she will be delighted to come down! It will be far more amusing for her to talk to you than to be bored up there." Alas! Swann had learned by experience that the good intentions of a third party are powerless to control a woman who is annoyed to find herself pursued even into a ball-room by a man whom she does not love. Too often, the kind friend comes down again alone.

My mother did not appear, but with no attempt to safeguard my self-respect (which depended upon her keeping up the fiction that she had asked me to let her know the result of my search for something or other) made Françoise tell me, in so many words "There is no answer"—words I have so often, since then, heard the hall-porters in 'mansions' and the flunkeys in gambling-clubs and the like, repeat to some poor girl, who replies in bewilderment: "What! he's said nothing? It's not possible. You did give him my letter, didn't you? Very well, I shall wait a little longer." And just as she invariably protests that she does not need the extra gas which the porter offers to light for her, and sits on there, hearing nothing further, except an occasional remark on the weather which the porter exchanges with a messenger whom he will send off suddenly, when he notices the time, to put some customer's wine on the ice; so, having declined Françoise's offer to make me some tea or to stay beside me, I let her go off again to the servants' hall, and lay down and shut my eyes, and tried not to hear the voices of my family who were drinking their coffee in the garden.

But after a few seconds I realised that, by writing that line to Mamma, by approaching—at the risk of making her angry—so near to her that I felt I could reach out and grasp the moment in which I should see her again, I had cut myself off from the possibility of going to sleep until I actually had seen her, and my heart began to beat more and more painfully as I increased my agitation by ordering myself to keep calm and to acquiesce in my ill-fortune. Then, suddenly, my anxiety subsided, a feeling of intense happiness coursed through me, as when a strong medicine begins to take effect and one's pain vanishes: I had formed a resolution to abandon all attempts to go to sleep without seeing Mamma, and had decided to kiss her at all costs, even with the certainty of being in disgrace with her for long afterwards, when she herself came up to bed. The tranquillity which followed my anguish made me extremely alert, no less than my sense of expectation, my thirst for and my fear of danger.

Noiselessly I opened the window and sat down on the foot of my bed; hardly daring to move in case they should hear me from below. Things outside seemed also fixed in mute expectation, so as not to disturb the moonlight which, duplicating each of them and throwing it back by the extension, forwards, of a shadow denser and more concrete than its substance, had made the whole landscape seem at once thinner and longer, like a map which, after being folded up, is spread out upon the ground. What had to move—a leaf of the chestnut-tree, for instance—moved. But its minute shuddering, complete, finished to the least detail and with utmost delicacy of gesture, made no discord with the rest of the scene, and yet was not merged in it, remaining clearly outlined. Exposed upon this surface of silence, which absorbed nothing from them, the most distant sounds, those which must have come from gardens at the far end of the town, could be distinguished with such exact 'finish' that the impression they gave of coming from a distance seemed due only to their 'pianissimo' execution, like those movements on muted strings so well performed by the orchestra of the Conservatoire that, although one does not lose a single note, one thinks all the same that they are being played somewhere outside, a long way from the concert hall, so that all the old subscribers, and my grandmother's sisters too, when Swann had given them his seats, used to strain their ears as if they had caught the distant approach of an army on the march, which had not yet rounded the corner of the Rue de Trévise.

I was well aware that I had placed myself in a position than which none could be counted upon to involve me in graver consequences at my parents' hands; consequences far graver, indeed, than a stranger would have imagined, and such as (he would have thought) could follow only some really shameful fault. But in the system of education which they had given me faults were not classified in the same order as in that of other children, and I had been taught to place at the head of the list (doubtless because there was no other class of faults from which I needed to be more carefully protected) those in which I can now distinguish the common feature that one succumbs to them by yielding to a nervous impulse. But such words as these last had never been uttered in my hearing; no one had yet accounted for my temptations in a way which might have led me to believe that there was some excuse for my giving in to them, or that I was actually incapable of holding out against them. Yet I could easily recognise this class of transgressions by the anguish of mind which preceded, as well as by the rigour of the punishment which followed them; and I knew that what I had just done was in the same category as certain other sins for which I had been severely chastised, though infinitely more serious than they. When I went out to meet my mother as she herself came up to bed, and when she saw that I had remained up so as to say good night to her again in the passage, I should not be allowed to stay in the house a day longer, I should be packed off to school next morning; so much was certain. Very good: had I been obliged, the next moment, to hurl myself out of the window, I should still have preferred such a fate. For what I wanted now was Mamma, and to say good night to her. I had gone too far along the road which led to the realisation of this desire to be able to retrace my steps.

I could hear my parents' footsteps as they went with Swann; and, when the rattle of the gate assured me that he had really gone, I crept to the window. Mamma was asking my father if he had thought the lobster good, and whether M. Swann had had some of the coffee-and-pistachio ice. "I thought it rather so-so," she was saying; "next time we shall have to try another flavour."

"I can't tell you," said my great-aunt, "what a change I find in Swann. He is quite antiquated!" She had grown so accustomed to seeing Swann always in the same stage of adolescence that it was a shock to her to find him suddenly less young than the age she still attributed to him. And the others too were beginning to remark in Swann that abnormal, excessive, scandalous senescence, meet only in a celibate, in one of that class for whom it seems that the great day which knows no morrow must be longer than for other men, since for such a one it is void of promise, and from its dawn the moments steadily accumulate without any subsequent partition among his offspring.

"I fancy he has a lot of trouble with that wretched wife of his, who 'lives' with a certain Monsieur de Charlus, as all Combray knows. It's the talk of the town."

My mother observed that, in spite of this, he had looked much less unhappy of late. "And he doesn't nearly so often do that trick of his, so like his father, of wiping his eyes and passing his hand across his forehead. I think myself that in his heart of hearts he doesn't love his wife any more."

"Why, of course he doesn't," answered my grandfather. "He wrote me a letter about it, ages ago, to which I took care to pay no attention, but it left no doubt as to his feelings, let alone his love for his wife. Hullo! you two; you never thanked him for the Asti!" he went on, turning to his sisters-in-law.

"What! we never thanked him? I think, between you and me, that I put it to him quite neatly," replied my aunt Flora.

"Yes, you managed it very well; I admired you for it," said my aunt Céline.

"But you did it very prettily, too."

"Yes; I liked my expression about 'nice neighbours.' "

"What! Do you call that thanking him?" shouted my grandfather. "I heard that all right, but devil take me if I guessed it was meant for Swann. You may be quite sure he never noticed it."

"Come, come; Swann is not a fool. I am positive he appreciated the compliment. You didn't expect me to tell him the number of bottles, or to guess what he paid for them."

My father and mother were left alone and sat down for a moment; then my father said: "Well, shall we go up to bed?"

"As you wish, dear, though I don't feel in the least like sleeping. I don't know why; it can't be the coffee-ice—it wasn't strong enough to keep me awake like this. But I see a light in the servants' hall: poor Françoise has been sitting up for me, so I will get her to unhook me while you go and undress."

My mother opened the latticed door which led from the hall to the staircase. Presently I heard her coming upstairs to close her window. I went quietly into the passage; my heart was beating so violently that I could hardly move, but at least it was throbbing no longer with anxiety, but with terror and with joy. I saw in the well of the stair a light coming upwards, from Mamma's candle. Then I saw Mamma herself: I threw myself upon her. For an instant she looked at me in astonishment, not realising what could have happened. Then her face assumed an expression of anger. She said not a single word to me; and, for that matter, I used to go for days on end without being spoken to, for far less offences than this. A single word from Mamma would have been an admission that further intercourse with me was within the bounds of possibility, and that might perhaps have appeared to me more terrible still, as indicating that, with such a punishment as was in store for me, mere silence, and even anger, were relatively puerile.

A word from her then would have implied the false calm in which one converses with a servant to whom one has just decided to give notice; the kiss one bestows on a son who is being packed off to enlist, which would have been denied him if it had merely been a matter of being angry with him for a few days. But she heard my father coming from the dressing-room, where he had gone to take off his clothes, and, to avoid the 'scene' which he would make if he saw me, she said, in a voice half-stifled by her anger: "Run away at once. Don't let your father see you standing there like a crazy jane!"

But I begged her again to "Come and say good night to me!" terrified as I saw the light from my father's candle already creeping up the wall, but also making use of his approach as a means of blackmail, in the hope that my mother, not wishing him to find me there, as find me he must if she continued to hold out, would give in to me, and say: "Go back to your room. I will come."

Too late: my father was upon us. Instinctively I murmured, though no one heard me, "I am done for!"

I was not, however. My father used constantly to refuse to let me do things which were quite clearly allowed by the more liberal charters granted me by my mother and grandmother, because he paid no heed to 'Principles,' and because in his sight there were no such things as 'Rights of Man.' For some quite irrelevant reason, or for no reason at all, he would at the last moment prevent me from taking some particular walk, one so regular and so consecrated to my use that to deprive me of it was a clear breach of faith; or again, as he had done this evening, long before the appointed hour he would snap out: "Run along up to bed now; no excuses!" But then again, simply because he was devoid of principles (in my grandmother's sense), so he could not, properly speaking, be called inexorable. He looked at me for a moment with an air of annoyance and surprise, and then when Mamma had told him, not without some embarrassment, what had happened, said to her: "Go along with him, then; you said just now that you didn't feel like sleep, so stay in his room for a little. I don't need anything."

"But dear," my mother answered timidly, "whether or not I feel like sleep is not the point; we must not make the child accustomed . . ."

"There's no question of making him accustomed," said my father, with a shrug of the shoulders; "you can see quite well that the child is unhappy. After all, we aren't gaolers. You'll end by making him ill, and a lot of good that will do. There are two beds in his room; tell Françoise to make up the big one for you, and stay beside him for the rest of the night. I'm off to bed, anyhow; I'm not nervous like you. Good night."

It was impossible for me to thank my father; what he called my sentimentality would have exasperated him. I stood there, not daring to move; he was still confronting us, an immense figure in his white nightshirt, crowned with the pink and violet scarf of Indian cashmere in which, since he had begun to suffer from neuralgia, he used to tie up his head, standing like Abraham in the engraving after Benozzo Gozzoli which M. Swann had given me, telling Sarah that she must tear herself away from Isaac. Many years have passed since that night. The wall of the staircase, up which I had watched the light of his candle gradually climb, was long ago demolished. And in myself, too, many things have perished which, I imagined, would last for ever, and new structures have arisen, giving birth to new sorrows and new joys which in those days I could not have foreseen, just as now the old are difficult of comprehension. It is a long time, too, since my father has been able to tell Mamma to "Go with the child." Never again will such hours be possible for me. But of late I have been increasingly able to catch, if I listen attentively, the sound of the sobs which I had the strength to control in my father's presence, and which broke out only when I found myself alone with Mamma. Actually, their echo has never ceased: it is only because life is now growing more and more quiet round about me that I hear them afresh, like those convent bells which are so effectively drowned during the day by the noises of the streets that one would suppose them to have been stopped for ever, until they sound out again through the silent evening air.

Mamma spent that night in my room: when I had just committed a sin so deadly that I was waiting to be banished from the household, my parents gave me a far greater concession than I should ever have won as the reward of a good action. Even at the moment when it manifested itself in this crowning mercy, my father's conduct towards me was still somewhat arbitrary, and regardless of my deserts, as was characteristic of him and due to the fact that his actions were generally dictated by chance expediencies rather than based on any formal plan. And perhaps even what I called his strictness, when he sent me off to bed, deserved that title less, really, than my mother's or grandmother's attitude, for his nature, which in some respects differed more than theirs from my own, had probably prevented him from guessing, until then, how wretched I was every evening, a thing which my mother and grandmother knew well; but they loved me enough to be unwilling to spare me that suffering, which they hoped to teach me to overcome, so as to reduce my nervous sensibility and to strengthen my will. As for my father, whose affection for me was of another kind, I doubt if he would have shewn so much courage, for as soon as he had grasped the fact that I was unhappy he had said to my mother: "Go and comfort him."

Mamma stayed all night in my room, and it seemed that she did not wish to mar by recrimination those hours, so different from anything that I had had a right to expect; for when Françoise (who guessed that something extraordinary must have happened when she saw Mamma sitting by my side, holding my hand and letting me cry unchecked) said to her: "But, Madame, what is little Master crying for?" she replied: "Why, Françoise, he doesn't know himself: it is his nerves. Make up the big bed for me quickly and then go off to your own." And thus for the first time my unhappiness was regarded no longer as a fault for which I must be punished, but as an involuntary evil which had been officially recognised a nervous condition for which I was in no way responsible: I had the consolation that I need no longer mingle apprehensive scruples with the bitterness of my tears; I could weep henceforward without sin. I felt no small degree of pride, either, in Françoise's presence at this return to humane conditions which, not an hour after Mamma had refused to come up to my room and had sent the snubbing message that I was to go to sleep, raised me to the dignity of a grown-up person, brought me of a sudden to a sort of puberty of sorrow, to emancipation from tears. I ought then to have been happy; I was not. It struck me that my mother had just made a first concession which must have been painful to her, that it was a first step down from the ideal she had formed for me, and that for the first time she, with all her courage, had to confess herself beaten. It struck me that if I had just scored a victory it was over her; that I had succeeded, as sickness or sorrow or age might have succeeded, in relaxing her will, in altering her judgment; that this evening opened a new era, must remain a black date in the calendar. And if I had dared now, I should have said to Mamma: "No, I don't want you; you mustn't sleep here." But I was conscious of the practical wisdom, of what would be called nowadays the realism with which she tempered the ardent idealism of my grandmother's nature, and I knew that now the mischief was done she would prefer to let me enjoy the soothing pleasure of her company, and not to disturb my father again. Certainly my mother's beautiful features seemed to shine again with youth that evening, as she sat gently holding my hands and trying to check my tears; but, just for that reason, it seemed to me that this should not have happened; her anger would have been less difficult to endure than this new kindness which my childhood had not known; I felt that I had with an impious and secret finger traced a first wrinkle upon her soul and made the first white hair shew upon her head. This thought redoubled my sobs, and then I saw that Mamma, who had never allowed herself to go to any length of tenderness with me, was suddenly overcome by my tears and had to struggle to keep back her own. Then, as she saw that I had noticed this, she said to me, with a smile: "Why, my little buttercup, my little canary-boy, he's going to make Mamma as silly as himself if this goes on. Look, since you can't sleep, and Mamma can't either, we mustn't go on in this stupid way; we must do something; I'll get one of your books." But I had none there. "Would you like me to get out the books now that your grandmother is going to give you for your birthday? Just think it over first, and don't be disappointed if there is nothing new for you then."

I was only too delighted, and Mamma went to find a parcel of books in which I could not distinguish, through the paper in which it was wrapped, any more than its squareness and size, but which, even at this first glimpse, brief and obscure as it was, bade fair to eclipse already the paint-box of last New Year's Day and the silkworms of the year before. It contained *La Mare au Diable, François le Champi, La Petite Fadette,* and *Les Maîtres Sonneurs.* My grandmother, as I learned afterwards, had at first chosen Musset's poems, a volume of Rousseau, and *Indiana;* for while she considered light reading as unwholesome as sweets and cakes, she did not reflect that the strong breath of genius must have upon the very soul of a child an influence at once more dangerous and less quickening than those of fresh air and country breezes upon his body. But when my father had seemed almost to regard her as insane on learning the names of the books she proposed to give me, she had journeyed back by herself to Jouy-le-Vicomte to the bookseller's, so that there should be no fear of my not having my present in time (it was a burning hot day, and she had come home so unwell that the doctor had warned my mother not to allow her again to tire herself in that way), and had there fallen back upon the four pastoral novels of George Sand.

"My dear," she had said to Mamma, "I could not allow myself to give the child anything that was not well written."

The truth was that she could never make up her mind to purchase anything from which no intellectual profit was to be derived, and, above all, that profit which good things bestowed on us by teaching us to seek our pleasures elsewhere than in the barren satisfaction of worldly wealth. Even when she had to make some one a present of the kind called 'useful,' when she had to give an armchair or some table-silver or a walking-stick, she would choose 'antiques,' as though their long desuetude had effaced from them any semblance of utility and fitted them rather to instruct us in the lives of the men of other days than to serve the common requirements of our own. She would have liked me to have in my room photographs of ancient buildings or of beautiful places. But at the moment of buying them, and for all that the subject of the picture had an aesthetic value of its own, she would find that vulgarity and utility had too prominent a part in them, through the mechanical nature of their reproduction by photography. She attempted by a subterfuge, if not to eliminate altogether their commercial banality, at least to minimise it, to substitute for the bulk of it what was art still, to introduce, as it might be, several 'thicknesses' of art; instead of photographs of Chartres Cathedral, of the Fountains of Saint-Cloud, or of Vesuvius she would inquire of Swann whether some great painter had not made pictures of them, and preferred to give me photographs of 'Chartres Cathedral' after Corot, of the 'Fountains of Saint-Cloud' after Hubert Robert, and of 'Vesuvius' after Turner, which were a stage higher in the scale of art. But although the photographer had been prevented from reproducing directly the masterpieces or the beauties of nature, and had there been replaced by a great artist, he resumed his odious position when it came to reproducing the artist's interpretation. Accordingly, having to reckon again with vulgarity, my grandmother would endeavour to postpone the moment of contact still further. She would ask Swann if the picture had not been engraved, preferring, when possible, old engravings with some interest of association apart from themselves, such, for example, as shew us a masterpiece in a state in which we can no longer see it to-day, as Morghen's print of the 'Cenacolo' of Leonardo before it was spoiled by restoration. It must be admitted that the results of this method of interpreting the art of making presents were not always happy. The idea which I formed of Venice, from a drawing by Titian which is supposed to have the lagoon in the background, was certainly far less accurate than what I have since derived from ordinary photographs. We could no longer keep count in the family (when my great-aunt tried to frame an indictment of my grandmother) of all the armchairs she had presented to married couples, young and old, which on a first attempt to sit down upon them had at once collapsed beneath the weight of their recipient. But my grandmother would have thought it sordid to concern herself too closely with the solidity of any piece of furniture in which could still be discerned a flourish, a smile, a brave conceit of the past. And even what in such pieces supplied a material need, since it did so in a manner to which we are no longer accustomed, was as charming to her as one of those old forms of speech in which we can still see traces of a metaphor whose fine point has been worn away by the rough usage of our modern tongue. In precisely the same way the pastoral novels of George Sand, which she was giving me for my birthday, were regular lumber-rooms of antique furniture, full of expressions that have fallen out of use and returned as imagery, such as one finds now only in country dialects. And my grandmother had bought them in preference to other books, just as she would have preferred to take a house that had a gothic dovecot, or some other such piece of antiquity as would have a pleasant effect on the mind, filling it with a nostalgic longing for impossible journeys through the realms of time.

Mamma sat down by my bed; she had chosen *François le Champi,* whose reddish cover and incomprehensible title gave it a distinct personality in my eyes and a mysterious attraction. I had not then read any real novels.

I had heard it said that George Sand was a typical novelist. That prepared me in advance to imagine that *François le Champi* contained something inexpressibly delicious. The course of the narrative, where it tended to arouse curiosity or melt to pity, certain modes of expression which disturb or sadden the reader, and which, with a little experience, he may recognise as 'common form' in novels, seemed to me then distinctive—for to me a new book was not one of a number of similar objects, but was like an individual man, unmatched, and with no cause of existence beyond himself—an intoxicating whiff of the peculiar essence of *François le Champi.* Beneath the everyday incidents, the commonplace thoughts and hackneyed words, I could hear, or overhear, an intonation, a rhythmic utterance fine and strange. The 'action' began: to me it seemed all the more obscure because in those days, when I read to myself, I used often, while I turned the pages, to dream of something quite different. And to the gaps which this habit made in my knowledge of the story more were added by the fact that when it was Mamma who was reading to me aloud she left all the love-scenes out. And so all the odd changes which take place in the relations between the miller's wife and the boy, changes which only the birth and growth of love can explain, seemed to me plunged and steeped in a mystery, the key to which (as I could readily believe) lay in that strange and pleasant-sounding name of *Champi,* which draped the boy who bore it, I knew not why, in its own bright colour, purpurate and charming. If my mother was not a faithful reader, she was, none the less, admirable when reading a work in which she found the note of true feeling by the respectful simplicity of her interpretation and by the sound of her sweet and gentle voice. It was the same in her daily life, when it was not works of art but men and women whom she was moved to pity or admire: it was touching to observe with what deference she would banish from her voice, her gestures, from her whole conversation, now the note of joy which might have distressed some mother who had long ago lost a child, now the recollection of an event or anniversary which might have reminded some old gentleman of the burden of his years, now the household topic which might have bored some young man of letters. And so, when she read aloud the prose of George Sand, prose which is everywhere redolent of that generosity and moral distinction which Mamma had learned from my grandmother to place above all other qualities in life, and which I was not to teach her until much later to refrain from placing, in the same way, above all other qualities in literature; taking pains to banish from her voice any weakness or affectation which might have blocked its channel for that powerful stream of language, she supplied all the natural tenderness, all the lavish sweetness which they demanded to phrases which seemed to have been composed for her voice, and which were all, so to speak, within her compass. She came to them with the tone that they required, with the cordial accent which existed before they were, which dictated them, but which is not to be found in the words themselves, and by these means she smoothed away, as she read on, any harshness there might be or discordance in the tenses of verbs, endowing the imperfect and the preterite with all the sweetness which there is in generosity, all the melancholy which there is in love; guided the sentence that was drawing to an end towards that which was waiting to begin, now hastening, now slackening the pace of the syllables so as to bring them, despite their difference of quantity, into a uniform rhythm, and breathed into this quite ordinary prose a kind of life, continuous and full of feeling.

My agony was soothed; I let myself be borne upon the current of this gentle night on which I had my mother by my side. I knew that such a night could not be repeated; that the strongest desire I had in the world, namely, to keep my mother in my room through the sad hours of darkness, ran too much counter to general requirements and to the wishes of others for such a concession as had been granted me this evening to be anything but a rare and casual exception. To-morrow night I should again be the victim of anguish and Mamma would not stay by my side. But when these storms of anguish grew calm I could no longer realise their existence; besides, to-morrow evening was still a long way off; I reminded myself that I should still have time to think about things, albeit that remission of time could bring me no access of power, albeit the coming event was in no way dependent upon the exercise of my will, and seemed not quite inevitable only because it was still separated from me by this short interval.

⁂

And so it was that, for a long time afterwards, when I lay awake at night and revived old memories of Combray, I saw no more of it than this sort of luminous panel, sharply defined against a vague and shadowy background, like the panels which a Bengal fire or some electric sign will illuminate and dissect from the front of a building the other parts of which remain plunged in darkness: broad enough at its base, the little parlour, the dining-room, the alluring shadows of the path along which would come M. Swann, the unconscious author of my sufferings, the hall through which I would journey to the first step of that staircase, so hard to climb, which constituted, all by itself, the tapering 'elevation' of an irregular pyramid; and, at the summit, my bedroom, with the little passage through whose glazed door Mamma would enter; in a word, seen always at the same evening hour, isolated from all its possible surroundings, detached and solitary against its shadowy background, the bare minimum of scenery necessary (like the setting one sees printed at the head of an old play, for its performance in the provinces) to the drama of my undressing, as though all Combray had consisted of but two floors joined by a slender staircase, and as though there had been no time there but seven o'clock at night. I must own that I could have assured any questioner that Combray did include other scenes and did exist at other hours than these. But since the facts which I should then have recalled would have been prompted only by an exercise of the will, by my intellectual memory, and since the pictures which that kind of memory shews us of the past preserve nothing of the past itself, I should never have had any wish to ponder over this residue of Combray. To me it was in reality all dead.

Permanently dead? Very possibly.

There is a large element of hazard in these matters, and a second hazard, that of our own death, often prevents us from awaiting for any length of time the favours of the first.

I feel that there is much to be said for the Celtic belief that the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, and so effectively lost to us until the day (which to many never comes) when we happen to pass by the tree or to obtain possession of the object which forms their prison. Then they start and tremble, they call us by our name, and as soon as we have recognised their voice the spell is broken. We have delivered them: they have overcome death and return to share our life.

And so it is with our own past. It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves must die.

Many years had elapsed during which nothing of Combray, save what was comprised in the theatre and the drama of my going to bed there, had any existence for me, when one day in winter, as I came home, my mother, seeing that I was cold, offered me some tea, a thing I did not ordinarily take. I declined at first, and then, for no particular reason, changed my mind. She sent out for one of those short, plump little cakes called 'petites madeleines,' which look as though they had been moulded in the fluted scallop of a pilgrim's shell. And soon, mechanically, weary after a dull day with the prospect of a depressing morrow, I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake. No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary changes that were taking place. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, but individual, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory—this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it was myself. I had ceased now to feel mediocre, accidental, mortal. Whence could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy? I was conscious that it was connected with the taste of tea and cake, but that it infinitely transcended those savours, could not, indeed, be of the same nature as theirs. Whence did it come? What did it signify? How could I seize upon and define it?

I drink a second mouthful, in which I find nothing more than in the first, a third, which gives me rather less than the second. It is time to stop; the potion is losing its magic. It is plain that the object of my quest, the truth, lies not in the cup but in myself. The tea has called up in me, but does not itself understand, and can only repeat indefinitely with a gradual loss of strength, the same testimony; which I, too, cannot interpret, though I hope at least to be able to call upon the tea for it again and to find it there presently, intact and at my disposal, for my final enlightenment. I put down my cup and examine my own mind. It is for it to discover the truth. But how? What an abyss of uncertainty whenever the mind feels that some part of it has strayed beyond its own borders; when it, the seeker, is at once the dark region through which it must go seeking, where all its equipment will avail it nothing. Seek? More than that: create. It is face to face with something which does not so far exist, to which it alone can give reality and substance, which it alone can bring into the light of day.

And I begin again to ask myself what it could have been, this unremembered state which brought with it no logical proof of its existence, but only the sense that it was a happy, that it was a real state in whose presence other states of consciousness melted and vanished. I decide to attempt to make it reappear. I retrace my thoughts to the moment at which I drank the first spoonful of tea. I find again the same state, illumined by no fresh light. I compel my mind to make one further effort, to follow and recapture once again the fleeting sensation. And that nothing may interrupt it in its course I shut out every obstacle, every extraneous idea, I stop my ears and inhibit all attention to the sounds which come from the next room. And then, feeling that my mind is growing fatigued without having any success to report, I compel it for a change to enjoy that distraction which I have just denied it, to think of other things, to rest and refresh itself before the supreme attempt. And then for the second time I clear an empty space in front of it. I place in position before my mind's eye the still recent taste of that first mouthful, and I feel something start within me, something that leaves its resting-place and attempts to rise, something that has been embedded like an anchor at a great depth; I do not know yet what it is, but I can feel it mounting slowly; I can measure the resistance, I can hear the echo of great spaces traversed.

Undoubtedly what is thus palpitating in the depths of my being must be the image, the visual memory which, being linked to that taste, has tried to follow it into my conscious mind. But its struggles are too far off, too much confused; scarcely can I perceive the colourless reflection in which are blended the uncapturable whirling medley of radiant hues, and I cannot distinguish its form, cannot invite it, as the one possible interpreter, to translate to me the evidence of its contemporary, its inseparable paramour, the taste of cake soaked in tea; cannot ask it to inform me what special circumstance is in question, of what period in my past life.

Will it ultimately reach the clear surface of my consciousness, this memory, this old, dead moment which the magnetism of an identical moment has travelled so far to importune, to disturb, to raise up out of the very depths of my being? I cannot tell. Now that I feel nothing, it has stopped, has perhaps gone down again into its darkness, from which who can say whether it will ever rise? Ten times over I must essay the task, must lean down over the abyss. And each time the natural laziness which deters us from every difficult enterprise, every work of importance, has urged me to leave the thing alone, to drink my tea and to think merely of the worries of to-day and of my hopes for to-morrow, which let themselves be pondered over without effort or distress of mind.

And suddenly the memory returns. The taste was that of the little crumb of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (because on those mornings I did not go out before church-time), when I went to say good day to her in her bedroom, my aunt Léonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of real or of lime-flower tea. The sight of the little madeleine had recalled nothing to my mind before I tasted it; perhaps because I had so often seen such things in the interval, without tasting them, on the trays in pastry-cooks' windows, that their image had dissociated itself from those Combray days to take its place among others more recent; perhaps because of those memories, so long abandoned and put out of mind, nothing now survived, everything was scattered; the forms of things, including that of the little scallop-shell of pastry, so richly sensual under its severe, religious folds, were either obliterated or had been so long dormant as to have lost the power of expansion which would have allowed them to resume their place in my consciousness. But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.

And once I had recognized the taste of the crumb of madeleine soaked in her decoction of lime-flowers which my aunt used to give me (although I did not yet know and must long postpone the discovery of why this memory made me so happy) immediately the old grey house upon the street, where her room was, rose up like the scenery of a theatre to attach itself to the little pavilion, opening on to the garden, which had been built out behind it for my parents (the isolated panel which until that moment had been all that I could see); and with the house the town, from morning to night and in all weathers, the Square where I was sent before luncheon, the streets along which I used to run errands, the country roads we took when it was fine. And just as the Japanese amuse themselves by filling a porcelain bowl with water and steeping in it little crumbs of paper which until then are without character or form, but, the moment they become wet, stretch themselves and bend, take on colour and distinctive shape, become flowers or houses or people, permanent and recognisable, so in that moment all the flowers in our garden and in M. Swann's park, and the water-lilies on the Vivonne and the good folk of the village and their little dwellings and the parish church and the whole of Combray and of its surroundings, taking their proper shapes and growing solid, sprang into being, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea.

COMBRAY

Combray at a distance, from a twenty-mile radius, as we used to see it from the railway when we arrived there every year in Holy Week, was no more than a church epitomising the town, representing it, speaking of it and for it to the horizon, and as one drew near, gathering close about its long, dark cloak, sheltering from the wind, on the open plain, as a shepherd gathers his sheep, the woolly grey backs of its flocking houses, which a fragment of its mediaeval ramparts enclosed, here and there, in an outline as scrupulously circular as that of a little town in a primitive painting. To live in, Combray was a trifle depressing, like its streets, whose houses, built of the blackened stone of the country, fronted with outside steps, capped with gables which projected long shadows downwards, were so dark that one had, as soon as the sun began to go down, to draw back the curtains in the sitting-room windows; streets with the solemn names of Saints, not a few of whom figured in the history of the early lords of Combray, such as the Rue Saint-Hilaire, the Rue Saint-Jacques, in which my aunt's house stood, the Rue Sainte-Hildegarde, which ran past her railings, and the Rue du Saint-Esprit, on to which the little garden gate opened; and these Combray streets exist in so remote a quarter of my memory, painted in colours so different from those in which the world is decked for me to-day, that in fact one and all of them, and the church which towered above them in the Square, seem to me now more unsubstantial than the projections of my magic-lantern; while at times I feel that to be able to cross the Rue Saint-Hilaire again, to engage a room in the Rue de l'Oiseau, in the old hostelry of the Oiseau Flesché, from whose windows in the pavement used to rise a smell of cooking which rises still in my mind, now and then, in the same warm gusts of comfort, would be to secure a contact with the unseen world more marvellously supernatural than it would be to make Golo's acquaintance and to chat with Geneviève de Brabant.

My grandfather's cousin—by courtesy my great-aunt—with whom we used to stay, was the mother of that aunt Léonie who, since her husband's (my uncle Octave's) death, had gradually declined to leave, first Combray, then her house in Combray, then her bedroom, and finally her bed; and who now never 'came down,' but lay perpetually in an indefinite condition of grief, physical exhaustion, illness, obsessions, and religious observances. Her own room looked out over the Rue Saint-Jacques, which ran a long way further to end in the Grand-Pré (as distinct from the Petit-Pré, a green space in the centre of the town where three streets met) and which, monotonous and grey, with the three high steps of stone before almost every one of its doors, seemed like a deep furrow cut by some sculptor of gothic images in the very block of stone out of which he had fashioned a Calvary or a Crib. My aunt's life was now practically confined to two adjoining rooms, in one of which she would rest in the afternoon while they aired the other. They were rooms of that country order which (just as in certain climes whole tracts of air or ocean are illuminated or scented by myriads of protozoa which we cannot see) fascinate our sense of smell with the countless odours springing from their own special virtues, wisdom, habits, a whole secret system of life, invisible, superabundant and profoundly moral, which their atmosphere holds in solution; smells natural enough indeed, and coloured by circumstances as are those of the neighbouring countryside, but already humanised, domesticated, confined, an exquisite, skilful, limpid jelly, blending all the fruits of the season which have left the orchard for the store-room, smells changing with the year, but plenishing, domestic smells, which compensate for the sharpness of hoar frost with the sweet savour of warm bread, smells lazy and punctual as a village clock, roving smells, pious smells; rejoicing in a peace which brings only an increase of anxiety, and in a prosiness which serves as a deep source of poetry to the stranger who passes through their midst without having lived amongst them. The air of those rooms was saturated with the fine bouquet of a silence so nourishing, so succulent that I could not enter them without a sort of greedy enjoyment, particularly on those first mornings, chilly still, of the Easter holidays, when I could taste it more fully, because I had just arrived then at Combray: before I went in to wish my aunt good day I would be kept waiting a little time in the outer room, where the sun, a wintry sun still, had crept in to warm itself before the fire, lighted already between its two brick sides and plastering all the room and everything in it with a smell of soot, making the room like one of those great open hearths which one finds in the country, or one of the canopied mantelpieces in old castles under which one sits hoping that in the world outside it is raining or snowing, hoping almost for a catastrophic deluge to add the romance of shelter and security to the comfort of a snug retreat; I would turn to and fro between the prayer-desk and the stamped velvet armchairs, each one always draped in its crocheted antimacassar, while the fire, baking like a pie the appetising smells with which the air of the room was thickly clotted, which the dewy and sunny freshness of the morning had already 'raised' and started to 'set,' puffed them and glazed them and fluted them and swelled them into an invisible though not impalpable country cake, an immense puff-pastry, in which, barely waiting to savour the crustier, more delicate, more respectable, but also drier smells of the cupboard, the chest-of-drawers, and the patterned wall-paper I always returned with an unconfessed gluttony to bury myself in the nondescript, resinous, dull, indigestible, and fruity smell of the flowered quilt.

In the next room I could hear my aunt talking quietly to herself. She never spoke save in low tones, because she believed that there was something broken in her head and floating loose there, which she might displace by talking too loud; but she never remained for long, even when alone, without saying something, because she believed that it was good for her throat, and that by keeping the blood there in circulation it would make less frequent the chokings and other pains to which she was liable;

besides, in the life of complete inertia which she led she attached to the least of her sensations an extraordinary importance, endowed them with a Protean ubiquity which made it difficult for her to keep them secret, and, failing a confidant to whom she might communicate them, she used to promulgate them to herself in an unceasing monologue which was her sole form of activity. Unfortunately, having formed the habit of thinking aloud, she did not always take care to see that there was no one in the adjoining room, and I would often hear her saying to herself: "I must not forget that I never slept a wink"—for "never sleeping a wink" was her great claim to distinction, and one admitted and respected in our household vocabulary; in the morning Françoise would not 'call' her, but would simply 'come to' her; during the day, when my aunt wished to take a nap, we used to say just that she wished to 'be quiet' or to 'rest'; and when in conversation she so far forgot herself as to say "what made me wake up," or "I dreamed that," she would flush and at once correct herself.

After waiting a minute, I would go in and kiss her; Françoise would be making her tea; or, if my aunt were feeling 'upset,' she would ask instead for her 'tisane,' and it would be my duty to shake out of the chemist's little package on to a plate the amount of lime-blossom required for infusion in boiling water. The drying of the stems had twisted them into a fantastic trellis, in whose intervals the pale flowers opened, as though a painter had arranged them there, grouping them in the most decorative poses. The leaves, which had lost or altered their own appearance, assumed those instead of the most incongruous things imaginable, as though the transparent wings of flies or the blank sides of labels or the petals of roses had been collected and pounded, or interwoven as birds weave the material for their nests. A thousand trifling little details—the charming prodigality of the chemist—details which would have been eliminated from an artificial preparation, gave me, like a book in which one is astonished to read the name of a person whom one knows, the pleasure of finding that these were indeed real lime-blossoms, like those I had seen, when coming from the train, in the Avenue de la Gare, altered, but only because they were not imitations but the very same blossoms, which had grown old. And as each new character is merely a metamorphosis from something older, in these little grey balls I recognised green buds plucked before their time; but beyond all else the rosy, moony, tender glow which lit up the blossoms among the frail forest of stems from which they hung like little golden roses—marking, as the radiance upon an old wall still marks the place of a vanished fresco, the difference between those parts of the tree which had and those which had not been 'in bloom'—shewed me that these were petals which, before their flowering-time, the chemist's package had embalmed on warm evenings of spring. That rosy candlelight was still their colour, but half-extinguished and deadened in the diminished life which was now theirs, and which may be called the twilight of a flower. Presently my aunt was able to dip in the boiling infusion, in which she would relish the savour of dead or faded blossom, a little madeleine, of which she would hold out a piece to me when it was sufficiently soft.

At one side of her bed stood a big yellow chest-of-drawers of lemon-wood, and a table which served at once as pharmacy and as high altar, on which, beneath a statue of Our Lady and a bottle of Vichy-Célestins, might be found her service-books and her medical prescriptions, everything that she needed for the performance, in bed, of her duties to soul and body, to keep the proper times for pepsin and for vespers. On the other side her bed was bounded by the window: she had the street beneath her eyes, and would read in it from morning to night to divert the tedium of her life, like a Persian prince, the daily but immemorial chronicles of Combray, which she would discuss in detail afterwards with Françoise.

I would not have been five minutes with my aunt before she would send me away in case I made her tired. She would hold out for me to kiss her sad brow, pale and lifeless, on which at this early hour she would not yet have arranged the false hair and through which the bones shone like the points of a crown of thorns or the beads of a rosary, and she would say to me: "Now, my poor child, you must go away; go and get ready for mass; and if you see Françoise downstairs, tell her not to stay too long amusing herself with you; she must come up soon to see if I want anything."

Françoise, who had been for many years in my aunt's service and did not at that time suspect that she would one day be transferred entirely to ours, was a little inclined to desert my aunt during the months which we spent in her house. There had been in my infancy, before we first went to Combray, and when my aunt Léonie used still to spend the winter in Paris with her mother, a time when I knew Françoise so little that on New Year's Day, before going into my great-aunt's house, my mother put a five-franc piece in my hand and said: "Now, be careful. Don't make any mistake. Wait until you hear me say 'Good morning, Françoise,' and I touch your arm before you give it to her." No sooner had we arrived in my aunt's dark hall than we saw in the gloom, beneath the frills of a snowy cap as stiff and fragile as if it had been made of spun sugar, the concentric waves of a smile of anticipatory gratitude. It was Françoise, motionless and erect, framed in the small doorway of the corridor like the statue of a saint in its niche. When we had grown more accustomed to this religious darkness we could discern in her features a disinterested love of all humanity, blended with a tender respect for the 'upper classes' which raised to the most honourable quarter of her heart the hope of receiving her due reward. Mamma pinched my arm sharply and said in a loud voice: "Good morning, Françoise." At this signal my fingers parted and I let fall the coin, which found a receptacle in a confused but outstretched hand. But since we had begun to go to Combray there was no one I knew better than Françoise. We were her favourites, and in the first years at least, while she shewed the same consideration for us as for my aunt, she enjoyed us with a keener relish, because we had, in addition to our dignity as part of 'the family' (for she had for those invisible bonds by which community of blood unites the members of a family as much respect as any Greek tragedian), the fresh charm of not being her customary employers. And so with what joy would she welcome us, with what sorrow complain that the weather was still so bad for us, on the day of our arrival, just before Easter, when there was often an icy wind; while Mamma inquired after her daughter and her nephews, and if her grandson was good-looking, and what they were going to make of him, and whether he took after his granny.

Later, when no one else was in the room, Mamma, who knew that Françoise was still mourning for her parents, who had been dead for years, would speak of them kindly, asking her endless little questions about them and their lives.

She had guessed that Françoise was not over-fond of her son-in-law, and that he spoiled the pleasure she found in visiting her daughter, as the two could not talk so freely when he was there. And so one day, when Françoise was going to their house, some miles from Combray, Mamma said to her, with a smile: "Tell me, Françoise, if Julien has had to go away, and you have Marguerite to yourself all day, you will be very sorry, but will make the best of it, won't you?"

And Françoise answered, laughing: "Madame knows everything; Madame is worse than the X-rays" (she pronounced 'x' with an affectation of difficulty and with a smile in deprecation of her, an unlettered woman's, daring to employ a scientific term) "they brought here for Mme. Octave, which see what is in your heart"—and she went off, disturbed that anyone should be caring about her, perhaps anxious that we should not see her in tears: Mamma was the first person who had given her the pleasure of feeling that her peasant existence, with its simple joys and sorrows, might offer some interest, might be a source of grief or pleasure to some one other than herself.

My aunt resigned herself to doing without Françoise to some extent during our visits, knowing how much my mother appreciated the services of so active and intelligent a maid, one who looked as smart at five o'clock in the morning in her kitchen, under a cap whose stiff and dazzling frills seemed to be made of porcelain, as when dressed for churchgoing; who did everything in the right way, who toiled like a horse, whether she was well or ill, but without noise, without the appearance of doing anything; the only one of my aunt's maids who when Mamma asked for hot water or black coffee would bring them actually boiling; she was one of those servants who in a household seem least satisfactory, at first, to a stranger, doubtless because they take no pains to make a conquest of him and shew him no special attention, knowing very well that they have no real need of him, that he will cease to be invited to the house sooner than they will be dismissed from it; who, on the other hand, cling with most fidelity to those masters and mistresses who have tested and proved their real capacity, and do not look for that superficial responsiveness, that slavish affability, which may impress a stranger favourably, but often conceals an utter barrenness of spirit in which no amount of training can produce the least trace of individuality.

When Françoise, having seen that my parents had everything they required, first went upstairs again to give my aunt her pepsin and to find out from her what she would take for luncheon, very few mornings passed but she was called upon to give an opinion, or to furnish an explanation, in regard to some important event.

"Just fancy, Françoise, Mme. Goupil went by more than a quarter of an hour late to fetch her sister: if she loses any more time on the way I should not be at all surprised if she got in after the Elevation."

"Well, there'd be nothing wonderful in that," would be the answer. Or:

"Françoise, if you had come in five minutes ago, you would have seen Mme. Imbert go past with some asparagus twice the size of what mother Callot has: do try to find out from her cook where she got them. You know you've been putting asparagus in all your sauces this spring; you might be able to get some like these for our visitors."

"I shouldn't be surprised if they came from the Curé's," Françoise would say, and:

"I'm sure you wouldn't, my poor Françoise," my aunt would reply, raising her shoulders. "From the Curé's, indeed! You know quite well that he can never grow anything but wretched little twigs of asparagus, not asparagus at all. I tell you these ones were as thick as my arm. Not your arm, of course, but my poor arm, which has grown so much thinner again this year." Or:

"Françoise, didn't you hear that bell just now! It split my head."

"No, Mme. Octave."

"Ah, poor girl, your skull must be very thick; you may thank God for that. It was Maguelone come to fetch Dr. Piperaud. He came out with her at once and they went off along the Rue de l'Oiseau. There must be some child ill."

"Oh dear, dear; the poor little creature!" would come with a sigh from Françoise, who could not hear of any calamity befalling a person unknown to her, even in some distant part of the world, without beginning to lament. Or:

"Françoise, for whom did they toll the passing-bell just now? Oh dear, of course, it would be for Mme. Rousseau. And to think that I had forgotten that she passed away the other night. Indeed, it is time the Lord called me home too; I don't know what has become of my head since I lost my poor Octave. But I am wasting your time, my good girl."

"Indeed no, Mme. Octave, my time is not so precious; whoever made our time didn't sell it to us. I am just going to see that my fire hasn't gone out."

In this way Françoise and my aunt made a critical valuation between them, in the course of these morning sessions, of the earliest happenings of the day. But sometimes these happenings assumed so mysterious or so alarming an air that my aunt felt she could not wait until it was time for Françoise to come upstairs, and then a formidable and quadruple peal would resound through the house.

"But, Mme. Octave, it is not time for your pepsin," Françoise would begin. "Are you feeling faint?"

"No, thank you, Françoise," my aunt would reply, "that is to say, yes; for you know well that there is very seldom a time when I don't feel faint; one day I shall pass away like Mme. Rousseau, before I know where I am; but that is not why I rang. Would you believe that I have just seen, as plainly as I see you, Mme. Goupil with a little girl I didn't know at all. Run and get a pennyworth of salt from Camus. It's not often that Théodore can't tell you who a person is."

"But that must be M. Pupin's daughter," Françoise would say, preferring to stick to an immediate explanation, since she had been perhaps twice already into Camus's shop that morning.

"M. Pupin's daughter! Oh, that's a likely story, my poor Françoise. Do you think I should not have recognised M. Pupin's daughter!"

"But I don't mean the big one, Mme. Octave; I mean the little girl, the one who goes to school at Jouy. I seem to have seen her once already this morning."

"Oh, if that's what it is!" my aunt would say, "she must have come over for the holidays. Yes, that is it. No need to ask, she will have come over for the holidays. But then we shall soon see Mme. Sazerat come along and ring her sister's door-bell, for her luncheon. That will be it! I saw the boy from Galopin's go by with a tart. You will see that the tart was for Mme. Goupil."

"Once Mme. Goupil has anyone in the house, Mme. Octave, you won't be long in seeing all her folk going in to their luncheon there, for it's not so early as it was," would be the answer, for Françoise, who was anxious to retire downstairs to look after our own meal, was not sorry to leave my aunt with the prospect of such a distraction.

"Oh! not before midday!" my aunt would reply in a tone of resignation, darting an uneasy glance at the clock, but stealthily, so as not to let it be seen that she, who had renounced all earthly joys, yet found a keen satisfaction in learning that Mme. Goupil was expecting company to luncheon, though, alas, she must wait a little more than an hour still before enjoying the spectacle. "And it will come in the middle of my luncheon!" she would murmur to herself. Her luncheon was such a distraction in itself that she did not like any other to come at the same time. "At least, you will not forget to give me my creamed eggs on one of the flat plates?" These were the only plates which had pictures on them and my aunt used to amuse herself at every meal by reading the description on whichever might have been sent up to her. She would put on her spectacles and spell out: "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," "Aladdin, or the Wonderful Lamp," and smile, and say "Very good indeed."

"I may as well go across to Camus . . ." Françoise would hazard, seeing that my aunt had no longer any intention of sending her there.

"No, no; it's not worth while now; it's certain to be the Pupin girl. My poor Françoise, I am sorry to have made you come upstairs for nothing."

But it was not for nothing, as my aunt well knew, that she had rung for Françoise, since at Combray a person whom one 'didn't know at all' was as incredible a being as any mythological deity, and it was apt to be forgotten that after each occasion on which there had appeared in the Rue du Saint-Esprit or in the Square one of these bewildering phenomena, careful and exhaustive researches had invariably reduced the fabulous monster to the proportions of a person whom one 'did know,' either personally or in the abstract, in his or her civil status as being more or less closely related to some family in Combray. It would turn out to be Mme. Sauton's son discharged from the army, or the Abbé Perdreau's niece come home from her convent, or the Curé's brother, a tax-collector at Châteaudun, who had just retired on a pension or had come over to Combray for the holidays. On first noticing them you have been impressed by the thought that there might be in Combray people whom you 'didn't know at all,' simply because you had failed to recognise or identify them at once. And yet long beforehand Mme. Sauton and the Curé had given warning that they expected their 'strangers.' In the evening, when I came in and went upstairs to tell my aunt the incidents of our walk, if I was rash enough to say to her that we had passed, near the Pont-Vieux, a man whom my grandfather didn't know:

"A man grandfather didn't know at all!" she would exclaim. "That's a likely story." None the less, she would be a little disturbed by the news, she would wish to have the details correctly, and so my grandfather would be summoned. "Who can it have been that you passed near the Pont-Vieux, uncle? A man you didn't know at all?"

"Why, of course I did," my grandfather would answer; "it was Prosper, Mme. Bouillebœuf's gardener's brother."

"Ah, well!" my aunt would say, calm again but slightly flushed still; "and the boy told me that you had passed a man you didn't know at all!" After which I would be warned to be more careful of what I said, and not to upset my aunt so by thoughtless remarks. Everyone was so well known in Combray, animals as well as people, that if my aunt had happened to see a dog go by which she 'didn't know at all' she would think about it incessantly, devoting to the solution of the incomprehensible problem all her inductive talent and her leisure hours.

"That will be Mme. Sazerat's dog," Françoise would suggest, without any real conviction, but in the hope of peace, and so that my aunt should not 'split her head.'

"As if I didn't know Mme. Sazerat's dog!"—for my aunt's critical mind would not so easily admit any fresh fact.

"Ah, but that will be the new dog M. Galopin has brought her from Lisieux."

"Oh, if that's what it is!"

"It seems, it's a most engaging animal," Françoise would go on, having got the story from Théodore, "as clever as a Christian, always in a good temper, always friendly, always everything that's nice. It's not often you see an animal so well-behaved at that age. Mme. Octave, it's high time I left you; I can't afford to stay here amusing myself; look, it's nearly ten o'clock and my fire not lighted yet, and I've still to dress the asparagus."

"What, Françoise, more asparagus! It's a regular disease of asparagus you have got this year: you will make our Parisians sick of it."

"No, no, Madame Octave, they like it well enough. They'll be coming back from church soon as hungry as hunters, and they won't eat it out of the back of their spoons, you'll see."

"Church! why, they must be there now; you'd better not lose any time. Go and look after your luncheon."

While my aunt gossiped on in this way with Françoise I would have accompanied my parents to mass. How I loved it: how clearly I can see it still, our church at Combray! The old porch by which we went in, black, and full of holes as a cullender, was worn out of shape and deeply furrowed at the sides (as also was the holy water stoup to which it led us) just as if the gentle grazing touch of the cloaks of peasant-women going into the church, and of their fingers dipping into the water, had managed by agelong repetition to acquire a destructive force, to impress itself on the stone, to carve ruts in it like those made by cart-wheels upon stone gate-posts against which they are driven every day. Its memorial stones, beneath which the noble dust of the Abbots of Combray, who were buried there, furnished the choir with a sort of spiritual pavement, were themselves no longer hard and lifeless matter, for time had softened and sweetened them, and had made them melt like honey and flow beyond their proper margins, either surging out in a milky, frothing wave, washing from its place a florid gothic capital, drowning the white violets of the marble floor; or else reabsorbed into their limits, contracting still further a crabbed Latin inscription, bringing a fresh touch of fantasy into the arrangement of its curtailed characters, closing together two letters of some word of which the rest were disproportionately scattered. Its windows were never so brilliant as on days when the sun scarcely shone, so that if it was dull outside you might be certain of fine weather in church. One of them was filled from top to bottom by a solitary figure, like the king on a playing-card, who lived up there beneath his canopy of stone, between earth and heaven; and in the blue light of its slanting shadow, on weekdays sometimes, at noon, when there was no service (at one of those rare moments when the airy, empty church, more human somehow and more luxurious with the sun shewing off all its rich furnishings, seemed to have almost a habitable air, like the hall—all sculptured stone and painted glass—of some mediaeval mansion), you might see Mme. Sazerat kneel for an instant, laying down on the chair beside her own a neatly corded parcel of little cakes which she had just bought at the baker's and was taking home for her luncheon. In another, a mountain of rosy snow, at whose foot a battle was being fought, seemed to have frozen the window also, which it swelled and distorted with its cloudy sleet, like a pane to which snowflakes have drifted and clung, but flakes illumined by a sunrise—the same, doubtless, which purpled the reredos of the altar with tints so fresh that they seemed rather to be thrown on it for a moment by a light shining from outside and shortly to be extinguished than painted and permanently fastened on the stone. And all of them were so old that you could see, here and there, their silvery antiquity sparkling with the dust of centuries and shewing in its threadbare brilliance the very cords of their lovely tapestry of glass. There was one among them which was a tall panel composed of a hundred little rectangular windows, of blue principally, like a great game of patience of the kind planned to beguile King Charles VI; but, either because a ray of sunlight had gleamed through it or because my own shifting vision had drawn across the window, whose colours died away and were rekindled by turns, a rare and transient fire—the next instant it had taken on all the iridescence of a peacock's tail, then shook and wavered in a flaming and fantastic shower, distilled and dropping from the groin of the dark and rocky vault down the moist walls, as though it were along the bed of some rainbow grotto of sinuous stalactites that I was following my parents, who marched before me, their prayer-books clasped in their hands; a moment later the little lozenge windows had put on the deep transparence, the unbreakable hardness of sapphires clustered on some enormous breastplate; but beyond which could be distinguished, dearer than all such treasures, a fleeting smile from the sun, which could be seen and felt as well here, in the blue and gentle flood in which it washed the masonry, as on the pavement of the Square or the straw of the market-place; and even on our first Sundays, when we came down before Easter, it would console me for the blackness and bareness of the earth outside by making burst into blossom, as in some springtime in old history among the heirs of Saint Louis, this dazzling and gilded carpet of forget-me-nots in glass.

Two tapestries of high warp represented the coronation of Esther (in which tradition would have it that the weaver had given to Ahasuerus the features of one of the kings of France and to Esther those of a lady of Guermantes whose lover he had been); their colours had melted into one another, so as to add expression, relief, light to the pictures. A touch of red over the lips of Esther had strayed beyond their outline; the yellow on her dress was spread with such unctuous plumpness as to have acquired a kind of solidity, and stood boldly out from the receding atmosphere; while the green of the trees, which was still bright in silk and wool among the lower parts of the panel, but had quite 'gone' at the top, separated in a paler scheme, above the dark trunks, the yellowing upper branches, tanned and half-obliterated by the sharp though sidelong rays of an invisible sun. All these things and, still more than these, the treasures which had come to the church from personages who to me were almost legendary figures (such as the golden cross wrought, it was said, by Saint Eloi and presented by Dagobert, and the tomb of the sons of Louis the Germanic in porphyry and enamelled copper), because of which I used to go forward into the church when we were making our way to our chairs as into a fairy-haunted valley, where the rustic sees with amazement on a rock, a tree, a marsh, the tangible proofs of the little people's supernatural passage—all these things made of the church for me something entirely different from the rest of the town; a building which occupied, so to speak, four dimensions of space—the name of the fourth being Time—which had sailed the centuries with that old nave, where bay after bay, chapel after chapel, seemed to stretch across and hold down and conquer not merely a few yards of soil, but each successive epoch from which the whole building had emerged triumphant, hiding the rugged barbarities of the eleventh century in the thickness of its walls, through which nothing could be seen of the heavy arches, long stopped and blinded with coarse blocks of ashlar, except where, near the porch, a deep groove was furrowed into one wall by the tower-stair; and even there the barbarity was veiled by the graceful gothic arcade which pressed coquettishly upon it, like a row of grown-up sisters who, to hide him from the eyes of strangers, arrange themselves smilingly in front of a countrified, unmannerly and ill-dressed younger brother; rearing into the sky above the Square a tower which had looked down upon Saint Louis, and seemed to behold him still; and thrusting down with its crypt into the blackness of a Merovingian night, through which, guiding us with groping finger-tips beneath the shadowy vault, ribbed strongly as an immense bat's wing of stone, Théodore or his sister would light up for us with a candle the tomb of Sigebert's little daughter, in which a deep hole, like the bed of a fossil, had been bored, or so it was said, "by a crystal lamp which, on the night when the Frankish princess was murdered, had left, of its own accord, the golden chains by which it was suspended where the apse is to-day and with neither the crystal broken nor the light extinguished had buried itself in the stone, through which it had gently forced its way."

And then the apse of Combray: what am I to say of that? It was so coarse, so devoid of artistic beauty, even of the religious spirit. From outside, since the street crossing which it commanded was on a lower level, its great wall was thrust upwards from a basement of unfaced ashlar, jagged with flints, in all of which there was nothing particularly ecclesiastical; the windows seemed to have been pierced at an abnormal height, and its whole appearance was that of a prison wall rather than of a church. And certainly in later years, were I to recall all the glorious apses that I had seen, it would never enter my mind to compare with any one of them the apse of Combray. Only, one day, turning out of a little street in some country town, I came upon three alley-ways that converged, and facing them an old wall, rubbed, worn, crumbling, and unusually high; with windows pierced in it far overhead and the same asymmetrical appearance as the apse of Combray. And at that moment I did not say to myself, as at Chartres I might have done or at Rheims, with what strength the religious feeling had been expressed in its construction, but instinctively I exclaimed "The Church!"

The church! A dear, familiar friend; close pressed in the Rue Saint-Hilaire, upon which its north door opened, by its two neighbours, Mme. Loiseau's house and the pharmacy of M. Rapin, against which its walls rested without interspace; a simple citizen of Combray, who might have had her number in the street had the streets of Combray borne numbers, and at whose door one felt that the postman ought to stop on his morning rounds, before going into Mme. Loiseau's and after leaving M. Rapin's, there existed, for all that, between the church and everything in Combray that was not the church a clear line of demarcation which I have never succeeded in eliminating from my mind. In vain might Mme. Loiseau deck her window-sills with fuchsias, which developed the bad habit of letting their branches trail at all times and in all directions, head downwards, and whose flowers had no more important business, when they were big enough to taste the joys of life, than to go and cool their purple, congested cheeks against the dark front of the church; to me such conduct sanctified the fuchsias not at all; between the flowers and the blackened stones towards which they leaned, if my eyes could discern no interval, my mind preserved the impression of an abyss.

From a long way off one could distinguish and identify the steeple of Saint-Hilaire inscribing its unforgettable form upon a horizon beneath which Combray had not yet appeared; when from the train which brought us down from Paris at Easter-time my father caught sight of it, as it slipped into every fold of the sky in turn, its little iron cock veering continually in all directions, he would say: "Come, get your wraps together, we are there." And on one of the longest walks we ever took from Combray there was a spot where the narrow road emerged suddenly on to an immense plain, closed at the horizon by strips of forest over which rose and stood alone the fine point of Saint-Hilaire's steeple, but so sharpened and so pink that it seemed to be no more than sketched on the sky by the finger-nail of a painter anxious to give to such a landscape, to so pure a piece of 'nature,' this little sign of art, this single indication of human existence. As one drew near it and could make out the remains of the square tower, half in ruins, which still stood by its side, though without rivalling it in height, one was struck, first of all, by the tone, reddish and sombre, of its stones; and on a misty morning in autumn one would have called it, to see it rising above the violet thunder-cloud of the vineyards, a ruin of purple, almost the colour of the wild vine.

Often in the Square, as we came home, my grandmother would make me stop to look up at it. From the tower windows, placed two and two, one pair above another, with that right and original proportion in their spacing to which not only human faces owe their beauty and dignity, it released, it let fall at regular intervals flights of jackdaws which for a little while would wheel and caw, as though the ancient stones which allowed them to sport thus and never seemed to see them, becoming of a sudden uninhabitable and discharging some infinitely disturbing element, had struck them and driven them forth. Then after patterning everywhere the violet velvet of the evening air, abruptly soothed, they would return and be absorbed in the tower, deadly no longer but benignant, some perching here and there (not seeming to move, but snapping, perhaps, and swallowing some passing insect) on the points of turrets, as a seagull perches, with an angler's immobility, on the crest of a wave. Without quite knowing why, my grandmother found in the steeple of Saint-Hilaire that absence of vulgarity, pretension, and meanness which made her love—and deem rich in beneficent influences—nature itself, when the hand of man had not, as did my great-aunt's gardener, trimmed it, and the works of genius. And certainly every part one saw of the church served to distinguish the whole from any other building by a kind of general feeling which pervaded it, but it was in the steeple that the church seemed to display a consciousness of itself, to affirm its individual and responsible existence. It was the steeple which spoke for the church. I think, too, that in a confused way my grandmother found in the steeple of Combray what she prized above anything else in the world, namely, a natural air and an air of distinction. Ignorant of architecture, she would say:

"My dears, laugh at me if you like; it is not conventionally beautiful, but there is something in its quaint old face which pleases me. If it could play the piano, I am sure it would really *play*." And when she gazed on it, when her eyes followed the gentle tension, the fervent inclination of its stony slopes which drew together as they rose, like hands joined in prayer, she would absorb herself so utterly in the outpouring of the spire that her gaze seemed to leap upwards with it; her lips at the same time curving in a friendly smile for the worn old stones of which the setting sun now illumined no more than the topmost pinnacles, which, at the point where they entered that zone of sunlight and were softened and sweetened by it, seemed to have mounted suddenly far higher, to have become truly remote, like a song whose singer breaks into falsetto, an octave above the accompanying air.

It was the steeple of Saint-Hilaire which shaped and crowned and consecrated every occupation, every hour of the day, every point of view in the town. From my bedroom window I could discern no more than its base, which had been freshly covered with slates; but when on Sundays I saw these, in the hot light of a summer morning, blaze like a black sun I would say to myself: "Good heavens! nine o'clock! I must get ready for mass at once if I am to have time to go in and kiss aunt Léonie first," and I would know exactly what was the colour of the sunlight upon the Square, I could feel the heat and dust of the market, the shade behind the blinds of the shop into which Mamma would perhaps go on her way to mass, penetrating its odour of unbleached calico, to purchase a handkerchief or something, of which the draper himself would let her see what he had, bowing from the waist: who, having made everything ready for shutting up, had just gone into the back shop to put on his Sunday coat and to wash his hands, which it was his habit, every few minutes and even on the saddest occasions, to rub one against the other with an air of enterprise, cunning, and success.

And again, after mass, when we looked in to tell Théodore to bring a larger loaf than usual because our cousins had taken advantage of the fine weather to come over from Thiberzy for luncheon, we had in front of us the steeple, which, baked and brown itself like a larger loaf still of 'holy bread,' with flakes and sticky drops on it of sunlight, pricked its sharp point into the blue sky. And in the evening, as I came in from my walk and thought of the approaching moment when I must say good night to my mother and see her no more, the steeple was by contrast so kindly, there at the close of day, that I would imagine it as being laid, like a brown velvet cushion, against—as being thrust into the pallid sky which had yielded beneath its pressure, had sunk slightly so as to make room for it, and had correspondingly risen on either side; while the cries of the birds wheeling to and fro about it seemed to intensify its silence, to elongate its spire still further, and to invest it with some quality beyond the power of words.

Even when our errands lay in places behind the church, from which it could not be seen, the view seemed always to have been composed with reference to the steeple, which would stand up, now here, now there, among the houses, and was perhaps even more affecting when it appeared thus without the church. And, indeed, there are many others which look best when seen in this way, and I can call to mind vignettes of housetops with surmounting steeples in quite another category of art than those formed by the dreary streets of Combray. I shall never forget, in a quaint Norman town not far from Balbec, two charming eighteenth-century houses, dear to me and venerable for many reasons, between which, when one looks up at them from a fine garden which descends in terraces to the river, the gothic spire of a church (itself hidden by the houses) soars into the sky with the effect of crowning and completing their fronts, but in a material so different, so precious, so beringed, so rosy, so polished, that it is at once seen to be no more a part of them than would be a part of two pretty pebbles lying side by side, between which it had been washed on the beach, the purple, crinkled spire of some sea-shell spun out into a turret and gay with glossy colour. Even in Paris, in one of the ugliest parts of the town, I know a window from which one can see across a first, a second, and even a third layer of jumbled roofs, street beyond street, a violet bell, sometimes ruddy, sometimes too, in the finest 'prints' which the atmosphere makes of it, of an ashy solution of black; which is, in fact, nothing else than the dome of Saint-Augustin, and which imparts to this view of Paris the character of some of the Piranesi views of Rome. But since into none of these little etchings, whatever the taste my memory may have been able to bring to their execution, was it able to contribute an element I have long lost, the feeling which makes us not merely regard a thing as a spectacle, but believe in it as in a creature without parallel, so none of them keeps in dependence on it a whole section of my inmost life as does the memory of those aspects of the steeple of Combray from the streets behind the church. Whether one saw it at five o'clock when going to call for letters at the post-office, some doors away from one, on the left, raising abruptly with its isolated peak the ridge of housetops; or again, when one had to go in and ask for news of Mme. Sazerat, one's eyes followed the line where it ran low again beyond the farther, descending slope, and one knew that it would be the second turning after the steeple; or yet again, if pressing further afield one went to the station, one saw it obliquely, shewing in profile fresh angles and surfaces, like a solid body surprised at some unknown point in its revolution; or, from the banks of the Vivonne, the apse, drawn muscularly together and heightened in perspective, seemed to spring upwards with the effort which the steeple made to hurl its spire-point into the heart of heaven: it was always to the steeple that one must return, always it which dominated everything else, summing up the houses with an unexpected pinnacle, raised before me like the Finger of God, Whose Body might have been concealed below among the crowd of human bodies without fear of my confounding It, for that reason, with them. And so even to-day in any large provincial town, or in a quarter of Paris which I do not know well, if a passer-by who is 'putting me on the right road' shews me from afar, as a point to aim at, some belfry of a hospital, or a convent steeple lifting the peak of its ecclesiastical cap at the corner of the street which I am to take, my memory need only find in it some dim resemblance to that dear and vanished outline, and the passer-by, should he turn round to make sure that I have not gone astray, would see me, to his astonishment, oblivious of the walk that I had planned to take or the place where I was obliged to call, standing still on the spot, before that steeple, for hours on end, motionless, trying to remember, feeling deep within myself a tract of soil reclaimed from the waters of Lethe slowly drying until the buildings rise on it again; and then no doubt, and then more uneasily than when, just now, I asked him for a direction, I will seek my way again, I will turn a corner . . . but . . . the goal is in my heart . . .

On our way home from mass we would often meet M. Legrandin, who, detained in Paris by his professional duties as an engineer, could only (except in the regular holiday seasons) visit his home at Combray between Saturday evenings and Monday mornings. He was one of that class of men who, apart from a scientific career in which they may well have proved brilliantly successful, have acquired an entirely different kind of culture, literary or artistic, of which they make no use in the specialised work of their profession, but by which their conversation profits. More 'literary' than many 'men of letters' (we were not aware at this period that M. Legrandin had a distinct reputation as a writer, and so were greatly astonished to find that a well-known composer had set some verses of his to music), endowed with a greater ease in execution than many painters, they imagine that the life they are obliged to lead is not that for which they are really fitted, and they bring to their regular occupations either a fantastic indifference or a sustained and lofty application, scornful, bitter, and conscientious. Tall, with a good figure, a fine, thoughtful face, drooping fair moustaches, a look of disillusionment in his blue eyes, an almost exaggerated refinement of courtesy; a talker such as we had never heard; he was in the sight of my family, who never ceased to quote him as an example, the very pattern of a gentleman, who took life in the noblest and most delicate manner. My grandmother alone found fault with him for speaking a little too well, a little too much like a book, for not using a vocabulary as natural as his loosely knotted Lavallière neckties, his short, straight, almost schoolboyish coat. She was astonished, too, at the furious invective which he was always launching at the aristocracy, at fashionable life, and 'snobbishness'—"undoubtedly," he would say, "the sin of which Saint Paul is thinking when he speaks of the sin for which there is no forgiveness."

Worldly ambition was a thing which my grandmother was so little capable of feeling, or indeed of understanding, that it seemed to her futile to apply so much heat to its condemnation. Besides, she thought it in not very good taste that M. Legrandin, whose sister was married to a country gentleman of Lower Normandy near Balbec, should deliver himself of such violent attacks upon the nobles, going so far as to blame the Revolution for not having guillotined them all.

"Well met, my friends!" he would say as he came towards us. "You are lucky to spend so much time here; to-morrow I have to go back to Paris, to squeeze back into my niche.

"Oh, I admit," he went on, with his own peculiar smile, gently ironical, disillusioned and vague, "I have every useless thing in the world in my house there. The only thing wanting is the necessary thing, a great patch of open sky like this. Always try to keep a patch of sky above your life, little boy," he added, turning to me. "You have a soul in you of rare quality, an artist's nature; never let it starve for lack of what it needs."

When, on our reaching the house, my aunt would send to ask us whether Mme. Goupil had indeed arrived late for mass, not one of us could inform her. Instead, we increased her anxiety by telling her that there was a painter at work in the church copying the window of Gilbert the Bad. Françoise was at once dispatched to the grocer's, but returned empty-handed owing to the absence of Théodore, whose dual profession of choirman, with a part in the maintenance of the fabric, and of grocer's assistant gave him not only relations with all sections of society, but an encyclopaedic knowledge of their affairs.

"Ah!" my aunt would sigh, "I wish it were time for Eulalie to come. She is really the only person who will be able to tell me."

Eulalie was a limping, energetic, deaf spinster who had 'retired' after the death of Mme. de la Bretonnerie, with whom she had been in service from her childhood, and had then taken a room beside the church, from which she would incessantly emerge, either to attend some service, or, when there was no service, to say a prayer by herself or to give Théodore a hand; the rest of her time she spent in visiting sick persons like my aunt Léonie, to whom she would relate everything that had occurred at mass or vespers. She was not above adding occasional pocket-money to the little income which was found for her by the family of her old employers by going from time to time to look after the Curé's linen, or that of some other person of note in the clerical world of Combray. Above a mantle of black cloth she wore a little white coif that seemed almost to attach her to some Order, and an infirmity of the skin had stained part of her cheeks and her crooked nose the bright red colour of balsam. Her visits were the one great distraction in the life of my aunt Léonie, who now saw hardly anyone else, except the reverend Curé. My aunt had by degrees erased every other visitor's name from her list, because they all committed the fatal error, in her eyes, of falling into one or other of the two categories of people she most detested. One group, the worse of the two, and the one of which she rid herself first, consisted of those who advised her not to take so much care of herself, and preached (even if only negatively and with no outward signs beyond an occasional disapproving silence or doubting smile) the subversive doctrine that a sharp walk in the sun and a good red beefsteak would do her more good (her, who had had two dreadful sips of Vichy water on her stomach for fourteen hours!) than all her medicine bottles and her bed. The other category was composed of people who appeared to believe that she was more seriously ill than she thought, in fact that she was as seriously ill as she said. And so none of those whom she had allowed upstairs to her room, after considerable hesitation and at Françoise's urgent request, and who in the course of their visit had shewn how unworthy they were of the honour which had been done them by venturing a timid: "Don't you think that if you were just to stir out a little on really fine days . . . ?" or who, on the other hand, when she said to them: "I am very low, very low; nearing the end, dear friends!" had replied: "Ah, yes, when one has no strength left! Still, you may last a while yet"; each party alike might be certain that her doors would never open to them again. And if Françoise was amused by the look of consternation on my aunt's face whenever she saw, from her bed, any of these people in the Rue du Saint-Esprit, who looked as if they were coming to see her, or heard her own door-bell ring, she would laugh far more heartily, as at a clever trick, at my aunt's devices (which never failed) for having them sent away, and at their look of discomfiture when they had to turn back without having seen her; and would be filled with secret admiration for her mistress, whom she felt to be superior to all these other people, inasmuch as she could and did contrive not to see them. In short, my aunt stipulated, at one and the same time, that whoever came to see her must approve of her way of life, commiserate with her in her sufferings, and assure her of an ultimate recovery.

In all this Eulalie excelled. My aunt might say to her twenty times in a minute: "The end is come at last, my poor Eulalie!", twenty times Eulalie would retort with: "Knowing your illness as you do, Mme. Octave, you will live to be a hundred, as Mme. Sazerin said to me only yesterday." For one of Eulalie's most rooted beliefs, and one that the formidable list of corrections which her experience must have compiled was powerless to eradicate, was that Mme. Sazerat's name was really Mme. Sazerin.

"I do not ask to live to a hundred," my aunt would say, for she preferred to have no definite limit fixed to the number of her days.

And since, besides this, Eulalie knew, as no one else knew, how to distract my aunt without tiring her, her visits, which took place regularly every Sunday, unless something unforeseen occurred to prevent them, were for my aunt a pleasure the prospect of which kept her on those days in a state of expectation, appetising enough to begin with, but at once changing to the agony of a hunger too long unsatisfied if Eulalie were a minute late in coming. For, if unduly prolonged, the rapture of waiting for Eulalie became a torture, and my aunt would never cease from looking at the time, and yawning, and complaining of each of her symptoms in turn. Eulalie's ring, if it sounded from the front door at the very end of the day, when she was no longer expecting it, would almost make her ill. For the fact was that on Sundays she thought of nothing else than this visit, and the moment that our luncheon was ended Françoise would become impatient for us to leave the dining-room so that she might go upstairs to 'occupy' my aunt. But—and this more than ever from the day on which fine weather definitely set in at Combray—the proud hour of noon, descending from the steeple of Saint-Hilaire which it blazoned for a moment with the twelve points of its sonorous crown, would long have echoed about our table, beside the 'holy bread,' which too had come in, after church, in its familiar way; and we would still be found seated in front of our Arabian Nights plates, weighed down by the heat of the day, and even more by our heavy meal. For upon the permanent foundation of eggs, cutlets, potatoes, preserves, and biscuits, whose appearance on the table she no longer announced to us, Françoise would add—as the labour of fields and orchards, the harvest of the tides, the luck of the markets, the kindness of neighbours, and her own genius might provide; and so effectively that our bill of fare, like the quatrefoils that were carved on the porches of cathedrals in the thirteenth century, reflected to some extent the march of the seasons and the incidents of human life—a brill, because the fish-woman had guaranteed its freshness; a turkey, because she had seen a beauty in the market at Roussainville-le-Pin; cardoons with marrow, because she had never done them for us in that way before; a roast leg of mutton, because the fresh air made one hungry and there would be plenty of time for it to 'settle down' in the seven hours before dinner; spinach, by way of a change; apricots, because they were still hard to get; gooseberries, because in another fortnight there would be none left; raspberries, which M. Swann had brought specially; cherries, the first to come from the cherry-tree, which had yielded none for the last two years; a cream cheese, of which in those days I was extremely fond; an almond cake, because she had ordered one the evening before; a fancy loaf, because it was our turn to 'offer' the holy bread. And when all these had been eaten, a work composed expressly for ourselves, but dedicated more particularly to my father, who had a fondness for such things, a cream of chocolate, inspired in the mind, created by the hand of Françoise, would be laid before us, light and fleeting as an 'occasional piece' of music, into which she had poured the whole of her talent. Anyone who refused to partake of it, saying: "No, thank you, I have finished; I am not hungry," would at once have been lowered to the level of the Philistines who, when an artist makes them a present of one of his works, examine its weight and material, whereas what is of value is the creator's intention and his signature. To have left even the tiniest morsel in the dish would have shewn as much discourtesy as to rise and leave a concert hall while the 'piece' was still being played, and under the composer's very eyes.

At length my mother would say to me: "Now, don't stay here all day; you can go up to your room if you are too hot outside, but get a little fresh air first; don't start reading immediately after your food."

And I would go and sit down beside the pump and its trough, ornamented here and there, like a gothic font, with a salamander, which modelled upon a background of crumbling stone the quick relief of its slender, allegorical body; on the bench without a back, in the shade of a lilac-tree, in that little corner of the garden which communicated, by a service door, with the Rue du Saint-Esprit, and from whose neglected soil rose, in two stages, an outcrop from the house itself and apparently a separate building, my aunt's back-kitchen. One could see its red-tiled floor gleaming like porphyry. It seemed not so much the cave of Françoise as a little temple of Venus. It would be overflowing with the offerings of the milkman, the fruiterer, the greengrocer, come sometimes from distant villages to dedicate here the first-fruits of their fields. And its roof was always surmounted by the cooing of a dove.

In earlier days I would not have lingered in the sacred grove which surrounded this temple, for, before going upstairs to read, I would steal into the little sitting-room which my uncle Adolphe, a brother of my grandfather and an old soldier who had retired from the service as a major, used to occupy on the ground floor, a room which, even when its opened windows let in the heat, if not actually the rays of the sun which seldom penetrated so far, would never fail to emit that vague and yet fresh odour, suggesting at once an open-air and an old-fashioned kind of existence, which sets and keeps the nostrils dreaming when one goes into a disused gun-room. But for some years now I had not gone into my uncle Adolphe's room, since he no longer came to Combray on account of a quarrel which had arisen between him and my family, by my fault, and in the following circumstances: Once or twice every month, in Paris, I used to be sent to pay him a visit, as he was finishing his luncheon, wearing a plain alpaca coat, and waited upon by his servant in a working-jacket of striped linen, purple and white. He would complain that I had not been to see him for a long time; that he was being neglected; he would offer me a marchpane or a tangerine, and we would cross a room in which no one ever sat, whose fire was never lighted, whose walls were picked out with gilded mouldings, its ceiling painted blue in imitation of the sky, and its furniture upholstered in satin, as at my grandparents', only yellow; then we would enter what he called his 'study,' a room whose walls were hung with prints which shewed, against a dark background, a plump and rosy goddess driving a car, or standing upon a globe, or wearing a star on her brow; pictures which were popular under the Second Empire because there was thought to be something about them that suggested Pompeii, which were then generally despised, and which now people are beginning to collect again for one single and consistent reason (despite any others which they may advance), namely, that they suggest the Second Empire. And there I would stay with my uncle until his man came, with a message from the coachman, to ask him at what time he would like the carriage. My uncle would then be lost in meditation, while his astonished servant stood there, not daring to disturb him by the least movement, wondering and waiting for his answer, which never varied. For in the end, after a supreme crisis of hesitation, my uncle would utter, infallibly, the words: "A quarter past two," which the servant would echo with amazement, but without disputing them: "A quarter past two! Very good, sir . . . I will go and tell him. . . ."

At this date I was a lover of the theatre: a Platonic lover, of necessity, since my parents had not yet allowed me to enter one, and so incorrect was the picture I drew for myself of the pleasures to be enjoyed there that I almost believed that each of the spectators looked, as into a stereoscope, upon a stage and scenery which existed for himself alone, though closely resembling the thousand other spectacles presented to the rest of the audience individually.

Every morning I would hasten to the Moriss column to see what new plays it announced. Nothing could be more disinterested or happier than the dreams with which these announcements filled my mind, dreams which took their form from the inevitable associations of the words forming the title of the play, and also from the colour of the bills, still damp and wrinkled with paste, on which those words stood out. Nothing, unless it were such strange titles as the *Testament de César Girodot, or Œdipe-Roi,* inscribed not on the green bills of the Opéra-Comique, but on the wine-coloured bills of the Comédie-Française, nothing seemed to me to differ more profoundly from the sparkling white plume of the *Diamants de la Couronne* than the sleek, mysterious satin of the *Domino Noir;* and since my parents had told me that, for my first visit to the theatre, I should have to choose between these two pieces, I would study exhaustively and in turn the title of one and the title of the other (for those were all that I knew of either), attempting to snatch from each a foretaste of the pleasure which it offered me, and to compare this pleasure with that latent in the other title, until in the end I had shewn myself such vivid, such compelling pictures of, on the one hand, a play of dazzling arrogance, and on the other a gentle, velvety play, that I was as little capable of deciding which play I should prefer to see as if, at the dinner-table, they had obliged me to choose between *rice à l'Impératrice* and the famous cream of chocolate.

All my conversations with my playfellows bore upon actors, whose art, although as yet I had no experience of it, was the first of all its numberless forms in which Art itself allowed me to anticipate its enjoyment. Between one actor's tricks of intonation and inflection and another's, the most trifling differences would strike me as being of an incalculable importance. And from what I had been told of them I would arrange them in the order of their talent in lists which I used to murmur to myself all day long: lists which in the end became petrified in my brain and were a source of annoyance to it, being irremovable.

And later, in my schooldays, whenever I ventured in class, when the master's head was turned, to communicate with some new friend, I would always begin by asking him whether he had begun yet to go to theatres, and if he agreed that our greatest actor was undoubtedly Got, our second Delaunay, and so on. And if, in his judgment, Febvre came below Thiron, or Delaunay below Coquelin, the sudden volatility which the name of Coquelin, forsaking its stony rigidity, would engender in my mind, in which it moved upwards to the second place, the rich vitality with which the name of Delaunay would suddenly be furnished, to enable it to slip down to fourth, would stimulate and fertilise my brain with a sense of budding and blossoming life.

But if the thought of actors weighed so upon me, if the sight of Maubant, coming out one afternoon from the Théâtre-Français, had plunged me in the throes and sufferings of hopeless love, how much more did the name of a 'star,' blazing outside the doors of a theatre, how much more, seen through the window of a brougham which passed me in the street, the hair over her forehead abloom with roses, did the face of a woman who, I would think, was perhaps an actress, leave with me a lasting disturbance, a futile and painful effort to form a picture of her private life.

I classified, in order of talent, the most distinguished: Sarah Bernhardt, Berma, Bartet, Madeleine Brohan, Jeanne Samary; but I was interested in them all. Now my uncle knew many of them personally, and also ladies of another class, not clearly distinguished from actresses in my mind. He used to entertain them at his house. And if we went to see him on certain days only, that was because on the other days ladies might come whom his family could not very well have met. So we at least thought; as for my uncle, his fatal readiness to pay pretty widows (who had perhaps never been married) and countesses (whose high-sounding titles were probably no more than *noms de guerre*) the compliment of presenting them to my grandmother or even of presenting to them some of our family jewels, had already embroiled him more than once with my grandfather. Often, if the name of some actress were mentioned in conversation, I would hear my father say, with a smile, to my mother: "One of your uncle's friends," and I would think of the weary novitiate through which, perhaps for years on end, a grown man, even a man of real importance, might have to pass, waiting on the doorstep of some such lady, while she refused to answer his letters and made her hall-porter drive him away; and imagine that my uncle was able to dispense a little jackanapes like myself from all these sufferings by introducing me in his own home to the actress, unapproachable by all the world, but for him an intimate friend.

And so—on the pretext that some lesson, the hour of which had been altered, now came at such an awkward time that it had already more than once prevented me, and would continue to prevent me, from seeing my uncle—one day, not one of the days which he set apart for our visits, I took advantage of the fact that my parents had had luncheon earlier than usual; I slipped out and, instead of going to read the playbills on their column, for which purpose I was allowed to go out unaccompanied, I ran all the way to his house. I noticed before his door a carriage and pair, with red carnations on the horses' blinkers and in the coachman's buttonhole. As I climbed the staircase I could hear laughter and a woman's voice, and, as soon as I had rung, silence and the sound of shutting doors. The man-servant who let me in appeared embarrassed, and said that my uncle was extremely busy and probably could not see me; he went in, however, to announce my arrival, and the same voice I had heard before said: "Oh, yes! Do let him come in; just for a moment; it will be so amusing. Is that his photograph there, on your desk? And his mother (your niece, isn't she?) beside it? The image of her, isn't he? I should so like to see the little chap, just for a second."

I could hear my uncle grumbling and growing angry; finally the man-servant told me to come in.

On the table was the same plate of marchpanes that was always there; my uncle wore the same alapca coat as on other days; but opposite to him, in a pink silk dress with a great necklace of pearls about her throat, sat a young woman who was just finishing a tangerine. My uncertainty whether I ought to address her as Madame or Mademoiselle made me blush, and not daring to look too much in her direction, in case I should be obliged to speak to her, I hurried across to kiss my uncle. She looked at me and smiled; my uncle said "My nephew!" without telling her my name or telling me hers, doubtless because, since his difficulties with my grandfather, he had endeavoured as far as possible to avoid any association of his family with this other class of acquaintance.

"How like his mother he is," said the lady.

"But you have never seen my niece, except in photographs," my uncle broke in quickly, with a note of anger.

"I beg your pardon, dear friend, I passed her on the staircase last year when you were so ill. It is true I only saw her for a moment, and your staircase is rather dark; but I saw well enough to see how lovely she was. This young gentleman has her beautiful eyes, and also *this*," she went on, tracing a line with one finger across the lower part of her forehead. "Tell me," she asked my uncle, "is your niece Mme.——; is her name the same as yours?"

"He takes most after his father," muttered my uncle, who was no more anxious to effect an introduction by proxy, in repeating Mamma's name aloud, than to bring the two together in the flesh. "He's his father all over, and also like my poor mother."

"I have not met his father, dear," said the lady in pink, bowing her head slightly, "and I never saw your poor mother. You will remember it was just after your great sorrow that we got to know one another."

I felt somewhat disillusioned, for this young lady was in no way different from other pretty women whom I had seen from time to time at home, especially the daughter of one of our cousins, to whose house I went every New Year's Day. Only better dressed; otherwise my uncle's friend had the same quick and kindly glance, the same frank and friendly manner. I could find no trace in her of the theatrical appearance which I admired in photographs of actresses, nothing of the diabolical expression which would have been in keeping with the life she must lead. I had difficulty in believing that this was one of 'those women,' and certainly I should never have believed her one of the 'smart ones' had I not seen the carriage and pair, the pink dress, the pearly necklace, had I not been aware, too, that my uncle knew only the very best of them. But I asked myself how the millionaire who gave her her carriage and her flat and her jewels could find any pleasure in flinging his money away upon a woman who had so simple and respectable an appearance. And yet, when I thought of what her life must be like, its immorality disturbed me more, perhaps, than if it had stood before me in some concrete and recognisable form, by its secrecy and invisibility, like the plot of a novel, the hidden truth of a scandal which had driven out of the home of her middle-class parents and dedicated to the service of all mankind which had brought to the flowering-point of her beauty, had raised to fame or notoriety this woman, the play of whose features, the intonations of whose voice, like so many others I already knew, made me regard her, in spite of myself, as a young lady of good family, her who was no longer of a family at all.

We had gone by this time into the 'study,' and my uncle, who seemed a trifle embarrassed by my presence, offered her a cigarette.

"No, thank you, dear friend," she said. "You know I only smoke the ones the Grand Duke sends me. I tell him that they make you jealous." And she drew from a case cigarettes covered with inscriptions in gold, in a foreign language. "Why, yes," she began again suddenly. "Of course I have met this young man's father with you. Isn't he your nephew? How on earth could I have forgotten? He was so nice, so charming to me," she went on, modestly and with feeling. But when I thought to myself what must actually have been the rude greeting (which, she made out, had been so charming), I, who knew my father's coldness and reserve, was shocked, as though at some indelicacy on his part, at the contrast between the excessive recognition bestowed on it and his never adequate geniality. It has since struck me as one of the most touching aspects of the part played in life by these idle, painstaking women that they devote all their generosity, all their talent, their transferable dreams of sentimental beauty (for, like all artists, they never seek to realise the value of those dreams, or to enclose them in the four-square frame of everyday life), and their gold, which counts for little, to the fashioning of a fine and precious setting for the rubbed and scratched and ill-polished lives of men. And just as this one filled the smoking-room, where my uncle was entertaining her in his alpaca coat, with her charming person, her dress of pink silk, her pearls, and the refinement suggested by intimacy with a Grand Duke, so, in the same way, she had taken some casual remark by my father, had worked it up delicately, given it a 'turn,' a precious title, set in it the gem of a glance from her own eyes, a gem of the first water, blended of humility and gratitude; and so had given it back transformed into a jewel, a work of art, into something altogether charming.

"Look here, my boy, it is time you went away," said my uncle.

I rose; I could scarcely resist a desire to kiss the hand of the lady in pink, but I felt that to do so would require as much audacity as a forcible abduction of her. My heart beat loud while I counted out to myself "Shall I do it, shall I not?" and then I ceased to ask myself what I ought to do so as at least to do something. Blindly, hotly, madly, flinging aside all the reasons I had just found to support such action, I seized and raised to my lips the hand she held out to me.

"Isn't he delicious! Quite a ladies' man already; he takes after his uncle. He'll be a perfect 'gentleman,' " she went on, setting her teeth so as to give the word a kind of English accentuation. "Couldn't he come to me some day for 'a cup of tea,' as our friends across the channel say; he need only send me a 'blue' in the morning?"

I had not the least idea of what a 'blue' might be. I did not understand half the words which the lady used, but my fear lest there should be concealed in them some question which it would be impolite in me not to answer kept me from withdrawing my close attention from them, and I was beginning to feel extremely tired.

"No, no; it is impossible," said my uncle, shrugging his shoulders. "He is kept busy at home all day; he has plenty of work to do. He brings back all the prizes from his school," he added in a lower tone, so that I should not hear this falsehood and interrupt with a contradiction. "You can't tell; he may turn out a little Victor Hugo, a kind of Vaulabelle, don't you know."

"Oh, I love artistic people," replied the lady in pink; "there is no one like them for understanding women. Them, and really nice men like yourself. But please forgive my ignorance. Who, what is Vaulabelle? Is it those gilt books in the little glass case in your drawing-room? You know you promised to lend them to me; I will take great care of them."

My uncle, who hated lending people books, said nothing, and ushered me out into the hall. Madly in love with the lady in pink, I covered my old uncle's tobacco-stained cheeks with passionate kisses, and while he, awkwardly enough, gave me to understand (without actually saying) that he would rather I did not tell my parents about this visit, I assured him, with tears in my eyes, that his kindness had made so strong an impression upon me that some day I would most certainly find a way of expressing my gratitude. So strong an impression had it made upon me that two hours later, after a string of mysterious utterances which did not strike me as giving my parents a sufficiently clear idea of the new importance with which I had been invested, I found it simpler to let them have a full account, omitting no detail, of the visit I had paid that afternoon. In doing this I had no thought of causing my uncle any unpleasantness. How could I have thought such a thing, since I did not wish it? And I could not suppose that my parents would see any harm in a visit in which I myself saw none. Every day of our lives does not some friend or other ask us to make his apologies, without fail, to some woman to whom he has been prevented from writing; and do not we forget to do so, feeling that this woman cannot attach much importance to a silence which has none for ourselves? I imagined, like everyone else, that the brains of other people were lifeless and submissive receptacles with no power of specific reaction to any stimulus which might be applied to them; and I had not the least doubt that when I deposited in the minds of my parents the news of the acquaintance I had made at my uncle's I should at the same time transmit to them the kindly judgment I myself had based on the introduction. Unfortunately my parents had recourse to principles entirely different from those which I suggested they should adopt when they came to form their estimate of my uncle's conduct. My father and grandfather had 'words' with him of a violent order; as I learned indirectly. A few days later, passing my uncle in the street as he drove by in an open carriage, I felt at once all the grief, the gratitude, the remorse which I should have liked to convey to him. Beside the immensity of these emotions I considered that merely to raise my hat to him would be incongruous and petty, and might make him think that I regarded myself as bound to shew him no more than the commonest form of courtesy. I decided to abstain from so inadequate a gesture, and turned my head away. My uncle thought that, in doing so, I was obeying my parents' orders; he never forgave them; and though he did not die until many years later, not one of us ever set eyes on him again.

And so I no longer used to go into the little sitting-room (now kept shut) of my uncle Adolphe; instead, after hanging about on the outskirts of the back-kitchen until Françoise appeared on its threshold and announced: "I am going to let the kitchen-maid serve the coffee and take up the hot water; it is time I went off to Mme. Octave," I would then decide to go indoors, and would go straight upstairs to my room to read. The kitchen-maid was an abstract personality, a permanent institution to which an invariable set of attributes assured a sort of fixity and continuity and identity throughout the long series of transitory human shapes in which that personality was incarnate; for we never found the same girl there two years running. In the year in which we ate such quantities of asparagus, the kitchen-maid whose duty it was to dress them was a poor sickly creature, some way 'gone' in pregnancy when we arrived at Combray for Easter, and it was indeed surprising that Françoise allowed her to run so many errands in the town and to do so much work in the house, for she was beginning to find a difficulty in bearing before her the mysterious casket, fuller and larger every day, whose splendid outline could be detected through the folds of her ample smocks. These last recalled the cloaks in which Giotto shrouds some of the allegorical figures in his paintings, of which M. Swann had given me photographs. He it was who pointed out the resemblance, and when he inquired after the kitchen-maid he would say: "Well, how goes it with Giotto's Charity?" And indeed the poor girl, whose pregnancy had swelled and stoutened every part of her, even to her face, and the vertical, squared outlines of her cheeks, did distinctly suggest those virgins, so strong and mannish as to seem matrons rather, in whom the Virtues are personified in the Arena Chapel. And I can see now that those Virtues and Vices of Padua resembled her in another respect as well. For just as the figure of this girl had been enlarged by the additional symbol which she carried in her body, without appearing to understand what it meant, without any rendering in her facial expression of all its beauty and spiritual significance, but carried as if it were an ordinary and rather heavy burden, so it is without any apparent suspicion of what she is about that the powerfully built housewife who is portrayed in the Arena beneath the label 'Caritas,' and a reproduction of whose portrait hung upon the wall of my schoolroom at Combray, incarnates that virtue, for it seems impossible, that any thought of charity can ever have found expression in her vulgar and energetic face. By a fine stroke of the painter's invention she is tumbling all the treasures of the earth at her feet, but exactly as if she were treading grapes in a wine-press to extract their juice, or, still more, as if she had climbed on a heap of sacks to raise herself higher; and she is holding out her flaming heart to God, or shall we say 'handing' it to Him, exactly as a cook might hand up a corkscrew through the skylight of her underground kitchen to some one who had called down to ask her for it from the ground-level above. The 'Invidia,' again, should have had some look on her face of envy. But in this fresco, too, the symbol occupies so large a place and is represented with such realism; the serpent hissing between the lips of Envy is so huge, and so completely fills her wide-opened mouth that the muscles of her face are strained and contorted, like a child's who is filling a balloon with his breath, and that Envy, and we ourselves for that matter, when we look at her, since all her attention and ours are concentrated on the action of her lips, have no time, almost, to spare for envious thoughts.

Despite all the admiration that M. Swann might profess for these figures of Giotto, it was a long time before I could find any pleasure in seeing in our schoolroom (where the copies he had brought me were hung) that Charity devoid of charity, that Envy who looked like nothing so much as a plate in some medical book, illustrating the compression of the glottis or uvula by a tumour in the tongue, or by the introduction of the operator's instrument, a Justice whose greyish and meanly regular features were the very same as those which adorned the faces of certain good and pious and slightly withered ladies of Combray whom I used to see at mass, many of whom had long been enrolled in the reserve forces of Injustice. But in later years I understood that the arresting strangeness, the special beauty of these frescoes lay in the great part played in each of them by its symbols, while the fact that these were depicted, not as symbols (for the thought symbolised was nowhere expressed), but as real things, actually felt or materially handled, added something more precise and more literal to their meaning, something more concrete and more striking to the lesson they imparted. And even in the case of the poor kitchen-maid, was not our attention incessantly drawn to her belly by the load which filled it; and in the same way, again, are not the thoughts of men and women in the agony of death often turned towards the practical, painful, obscure, internal, intestinal aspect, towards that 'seamy side' of death which is, as it happens, the side that death actually presents to them and forces them to feel, a side which far more closely resembles a crushing burden, a difficulty in breathing, a destroying thirst, than the abstract idea to which we are accustomed to give the name of Death?

There must have been a strong element of reality in those Virtues and Vices of Padua, since they appeared to me to be as much alive as the pregnant servant-girl, while she herself appeared scarcely less allegorical than they. And, quite possibly, this lack (or seeming lack) of participation by a person's soul in the significant marks of its own special virtue has, apart from its aesthetic meaning, a reality which, if not strictly psychological, may at least be called physiognomical. Later on, when, in the course of my life, I have had occasion to meet with, in convents for instance, literally saintly examples of practical charity, they have generally had the brisk, decided, undisturbed, and slightly brutal air of a busy surgeon, the face in which one can discern no commiseration, no tenderness at the sight of suffering humanity, and no fear of hurting it, the face devoid of gentleness or sympathy, the sublime face of true goodness.

Then while the kitchen-maid—who, all unawares, made the superior qualities of Françoise shine with added lustre, just as Error, by force of contrast, enhances the triumph of Truth—took in coffee which (according to Mamma) was nothing more than hot water, and then carried up to our rooms hot water which was barely tepid, I would be lying stretched out on my bed, a book in my hand, in my room which trembled with the effort to defend its frail, transparent coolness against the afternoon sun, behind its almost closed shutters through which, however, a reflection of the sunlight had contrived to slip in on its golden wings, remaining motionless, between glass and woodwork, in a corner, like a butterfly poised upon a flower. It was hardly light enough for me to read, and my feeling of the day's brightness and splendour was derived solely from the blows struck down below, in the Rue de la Cure, by Camus (whom Françoise had assured that my aunt was not 'resting' and that he might therefore make a noise), upon some old packing-cases from which nothing would really be sent flying but the dust, though the din of them, in the resonant atmosphere that accompanies hot weather, seemed to scatter broadcast a rain of blood-red stars; and from the flies who performed for my benefit, in their small concert, as it might be the chamber music of summer; evoking heat and light quite differently from an air of human music which, if you happen to have heard it during a fine summer, will always bring that summer back to your mind, the flies' music is bound to the season by a closer, a more vital tie—born of sunny days, and not to be reborn but with them, containing something of their essential nature, it not merely calls up their image in our memory, but gives us a guarantee that they do really exist, that they are close around us, immediately accessible.

This dim freshness of my room was to the broad daylight of the street what the shadow is to the sunbeam, that is to say, equally luminous, and presented to my imagination the entire panorama of summer, which my senses, if I had been out walking, could have tasted and enjoyed in fragments only; and so was quite in harmony with my state of repose, which (thanks to the adventures related in my books, which had just excited it) bore, like a hand reposing motionless in a stream of running water, the shock and animation of a torrent of activity and life.

But my grandmother, even if the weather, after growing too hot, had broken, and a storm, or just a shower, had burst over us, would come up and beg me to go outside. And as I did not wish to leave off my book, I would go on with it in the garden, under the chestnut-tree, in a little sentry-box of canvas and matting, in the farthest recesses of which I used to sit and feel that I was hidden from the eyes of anyone who might be coming to call upon the family.

And then my thoughts, did not they form a similar sort of hiding-hole, in the depths of which I felt that I could bury myself and remain invisible even when I was looking at what went on outside? When I saw any external object, my consciousness that I was seeing it would remain between me and it, enclosing it in a slender, incorporeal outline which prevented me from ever coming directly in contact with the material form; for it would volatilise itself in some way before I could touch it, just as an incandescent body which is moved towards something wet never actually touches moisture, since it is always preceded, itself, by a zone of evaporation. Upon the sort of screen, patterned with different states and impressions, which my consciousness would quietly unfold while I was reading, and which ranged from the most deeply hidden aspirations of my heart to the wholly external view of the horizon spread out before my eyes at the foot of the garden, what was from the first the most permanent and the most intimate part of me, the lever whose incessant movements controlled all the rest, was my belief in the philosophic richness and beauty of the book I was reading, and my desire to appropriate these to myself, whatever the book might be. For even if I had purchased it at Combray, having seen it outside Borange's, whose grocery lay too far from our house for Françoise to be able to deal there, as she did with Camus, but who enjoyed better custom as a stationer and bookseller; even if I had seen it, tied with string to keep it in its place in the mosaic of monthly parts and pamphlets which adorned either side of his doorway, a doorway more mysterious, more teeming with suggestion than that of a cathedral, I should have noticed and bought it there simply because I had recognised it as a book which had been well spoken of, in my hearing, by the school-master or the school-friend who, at that particular time, seemed to me to be entrusted with the secret of Truth and Beauty, things half-felt by me, half-incomprehensible, the full understanding of which was the vague but permanent object of my thoughts.

Next to this central belief, which, while I was reading, would be constantly in motion from my inner self to the outer world, towards the discovery of Truth, came the emotions aroused in me by the action in which I would be taking part, for these afternoons were crammed with more dramatic and sensational events than occur, often, in a whole lifetime. These were the events which took place in the book I was reading. It is true that the people concerned in them were not what Françoise would have called 'real people.' But none of the feelings which the joys or misfortunes of a 'real' person awaken in us can be awakened except through a mental picture of those joys or misfortunes; and the ingenuity of the first novelist lay in his understanding that, as the picture was the one essential element in the complicated structure of our emotions, so that simplification of it which consisted in the suppression, pure and simple, of 'real' people would be a decided improvement. A 'real' person, profoundly as we may sympathise with him, is in a great measure perceptible only through our senses, that is to say, he remains opaque, offers a dead weight which our sensibilities have not the strength to lift. If some misfortune comes to him, it is only in one small section of the complete idea we have of him that we are capable of feeling any emotion; indeed it is only in one small section of the complete idea he has of himself that he is capable of feeling any emotion either. The novelist's happy discovery was to think of substituting for those opaque sections, impenetrable by the human spirit, their equivalent in immaterial sections, things, that is, which the spirit can assimilate to itself. After which it matters not that the actions, the feelings of this new order of creatures appear to us in the guise of truth, since we have made them our own, since it is in ourselves that they are happening, that they are holding in thrall, while we turn over, feverishly, the pages of the book, our quickened breath and staring eyes. And once the novelist has brought us to that state, in which, as in all purely mental states, every emotion is multiplied ten-fold, into which his book comes to disturb us as might a dream, but a dream more lucid, and of a more lasting impression than those which come to us in sleep;

why, then, for the space of an hour he sets free within us all the joys and sorrows in the world, a few of which, only, we should have to spend years of our actual life in getting to know, and the keenest, the most intense of which would never have been revealed to us because the slow course of their development stops our perception of them. It is the same in life; the heart changes, and that is our worst misfortune; but we learn of it only from reading or by imagination; for in reality its alteration, like that of certain natural phenomena, is so gradual that, even if we are able to distinguish, successively, each of its different states, we are still spared the actual sensation of change.

Next to, but distinctly less intimate a part of myself than this human element, would come the view, more or less projected before my eyes, of the country in which the action of the story was taking place, which made a far stronger impression on my mind than the other, the actual landscape which would meet my eyes when I raised them from my book. In this way, for two consecutive summers I used to sit in the heat of our Combray garden, sick with a longing inspired by the book I was then reading for a land of mountains and rivers, where I could see an endless vista of sawmills, where beneath the limpid currents fragments of wood lay mouldering in beds of watercress; and nearby, rambling and clustering along low walls, purple flowers and red. And since there was always lurking in my mind the dream of a woman who would enrich me with her love, that dream in those two summers used to be quickened with the freshness and coolness of running water; and whoever she might be, the woman whose image I called to mind, purple flowers and red would at once spring up on either side of her like complementary colours.

This was not only because an image of which we dream remains for ever distinguished, is adorned and enriched by the association of colours not its own which may happen to surround it in our mental picture; for the scenes in the books I read were to me not merely scenery more vividly portrayed by my imagination than any which Combray could spread before my eyes but otherwise of the same kind. Because of the selection that the author had made of them, because of the spirit of faith in which my mind would exceed and anticipate his printed word, as it might be interpreting a revelation, these scenes used to give me the impression—one which I hardly ever derived from any place in which I might happen to be, and never from our garden, that undistinguished product of the strictly conventional fantasy of the gardener whom my grandmother so despised—of their being actually part of Nature herself, and worthy to be studied and explored.

Had my parents allowed me, when I read a book, to pay a visit to the country it described, I should have felt that I was making an enormous advance towards the ultimate conquest of truth. For even if we have the sensation of being always enveloped in, surrounded by our own soul, still it does not seem a fixed and immovable prison; rather do we seem to be borne away with it, and perpetually struggling to pass beyond it, to break out into the world, with a perpetual discouragement as we hear endlessly, all around us, that unvarying sound which is no echo from without, but the resonance of a vibration from within. We try to discover in things, endeared to us on that account, the spiritual glamour which we ourselves have cast upon them; we are disillusioned, and learn that they are in themselves barren and devoid of the charm which they owed, in our minds, to the association of certain ideas; sometimes we mobilise all our spiritual forces in a glittering array so as to influence and subjugate other human beings who, as we very well know, are situated outside ourselves, where we can never reach them. And so, if I always imagined the woman I loved as in a setting of whatever places I most longed, at the time, to visit; if in my secret longings it was she who attracted me to them, who opened to me the gate of an unknown world, that was not by the mere hazard of a simple association of thoughts; no, it was because my dreams of travel and of love were only moments—which I isolate artifically to-day as though I were cutting sections, at different heights, in a jet of water, rainbow-flashing but seemingly without flow or motion—were only drops in a single, undeviating, irresistible outrush of all the forces of my life.

And then, as I continue to trace the outward course of these impressions from their close-packed intimate source in my consciousness, and before I come to the horizon of reality which envelops them, I discover pleasures of another kind, those of being comfortably seated, of tasting the good scent on the air, of not being disturbed by any visitor; and, when an hour chimed from the steeple of Saint-Hilaire, of watching what was already spent of the afternoon fall drop by drop until I heard the last stroke which enabled me to add up the total sum, after which the silence that followed seemed to herald the beginning, in the blue sky above me, of that long part of the day still allowed me for reading, until the good dinner which Françoise was even now preparing should come to strengthen and refresh me after the strenuous pursuit of its hero through the pages of my book. And, as each hour struck, it would seem to me that a few seconds only had passed since the hour before; the latest would inscribe itself, close to its predecessor, on the sky's surface, and I would be unable to believe that sixty minutes could be squeezed into the tiny arc of blue which was comprised between their two golden figures. Sometimes it would even happen that this precocious hour would sound two strokes more than the last; there must then have been an hour which I had not heard strike; something which had taken place had not taken place for me; the fascination of my book, a magic as potent as the deepest slumber, had stopped my enchanted ears and had obliterated the sound of that golden bell from the azure surface of the enveloping silence. Sweet Sunday afternoons beneath the chestnut-tree in our Combray garden, from which I was careful to eliminate every commonplace incident of my actual life, replacing them by a career of strange adventures and ambitions in a land watered by living streams, you still recall those adventures and ambitions to my mind when I think of you, and you embody and preserve them by virtue of having little by little drawn round and enclosed them (while I went on with my book and the heat of the day declined) in the gradual crystallisation, slowly altering in form and dappled with a pattern of chestnut-leaves, of your silent, sonorous, fragrant, limpid hours.

Sometimes I would be torn from my book, in the middle of the afternoon, by the gardener's daughter, who came running like a mad thing, overturning an orange-tree in its tub, cutting a finger, breaking a tooth, and screaming out "They're coming, they're coming!" so that Françoise and I should run too and not miss anything of the show. That was on days when the cavalry stationed in Combray went out for some military exercise, going as a rule by the Rue Sainte-Hildegarde. While our servants, sitting in a row on their chairs outside the garden railings, stared at the people of Combray taking their Sunday walks and were stared at in return, the gardener's daughter, through the gap which there was between two houses far away in the Avenue de la Gare, would have spied the glitter of helmets. The servants then hurried in with their chairs, for when the troopers filed through the Rue Sainte-Hildegarde they filled it from side to side, and their jostling horses scraped against the walls of the houses, covering and drowning the pavements like banks which present too narrow a channel to a river in flood.

"Poor children," Françoise would exclaim, in tears almost before she had reached the railings; "poor boys, to be mown down like grass in a meadow. It's just shocking to think of," she would go on, laying a hand over her heart, where presumably she had felt the shock.

"A fine sight, isn't it, Mme. Françoise, all these young fellows not caring two straws for their lives?" the gardener would ask, just to 'draw' her. And he would not have spoken in vain.

"Not caring for their lives, is it? Why, what in the world is there that we should care for if it's not our lives, the only gift the Lord never offers us a second time? Oh dear, oh dear; you're right all the same; it's quite true, they don't care! I can remember them in '70; in those wretched wars they've no fear of death left in them; they're nothing more nor less than madmen; and then they aren't worth the price of a rope to hang them with; they're not men any more, they're lions." For by her way of thinking, to compare a man with a lion, which she used to pronounce 'lie-on,' was not at all complimentary to the man.

The Rue Sainte-Hildegarde turned too sharply for us to be able to see people approaching at any distance, and it was only through the gap between those two houses in the Avenue de la Gare that we could still make out fresh helmets racing along towards us, and flashing in the sunlight. The gardener wanted to know whether there were still many to come, and he was thirsty besides, with the sun beating down upon his head. So then, suddenly, his daughter would leap out, as though from a beleaguered city, would make a sortie, turn the street corner, and, having risked her life a hundred times over, reappear and bring us, with a jug of liquorice-water, the news that there were still at least a thousand of them, pouring along without a break from the direction of Thiberzy and Méséglise. Françoise and the gardener, having 'made up' their difference, would discuss the line to be followed in case of war.

"Don't you see, Françoise," he would say. "Revolution would be better, because then no one would need to join in unless he liked."

"Oh, yes, I can see that, certainly; it's more straightforward."

The gardener believed that, as soon as war was declared, they would stop all the railways.

"Yes, to be sure; so that we sha'n't get away," said Françoise.

And the gardener would assent, with "Ay, they're the cunning ones," for he would not allow that war was anything but a kind of trick which the state attempted to play on the people, or that there was a man in the world who would not run away from it if he had the chance to do so.

But Françoise would hasten back to my aunt, and I would return to my book, and the servants would take their places again outside the gate to watch the dust settle on the pavement, and the excitement caused by the passage of the soldiers subside. Long after order had been restored, an abnormal tide of humanity would continue to darken the streets of Combray. And in front of every house, even of those where it was not, as a rule, 'done,' the servants, and sometimes even the masters would sit and stare, festooning their doorsteps with a dark, irregular fringe, like the border of shells and sea-weed which a stronger tide than usual leaves on the beach, as though trimming it with embroidered crape, when the sea itself has retreated.

Except on such days as these, however, I would as a rule be left to read in peace. But the interruption which a visit from Swann once made, and the commentary which he then supplied to the course of my reading, which had brought me to the work of an author quite new to me, called Bergotte, had this definite result that for a long time afterwards it was not against a wall gay with spikes of purple blossom, but on a wholly different background, the porch of a gothic cathedral, that I would see outlined the figure of one of the women of whom I dreamed.

I had heard Bergotte spoken of, for the first time, by a friend older than myself, for whom I had a strong admiration, a precious youth of the name of Bloch. Hearing me confess my love of the *Nuit d'Octobre,* he had burst out in a bray of laughter, like a bugle-call, and told me, by way of warning: "You must conquer your vile taste for A. de Musset, Esquire. He is a bad egg, one of the very worst, a pretty detestable specimen. I am bound to admit, natheless," he added graciously, "that he, and even the man Racine, did, each of them, once in his life, compose a line which is not only fairly rhythmical, but has also what is in my eyes the supreme merit of meaning absolutely nothing. One is

La blanche Oloossone et la blanche Camire,

and the other

La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaë.

They were submitted to my judgment, as evidence for the defence of the two runagates, in an article by my very dear master Father Lecomte, who is found pleasing in the sight of the immortal gods. By which token, here is a book which I have not the time, just now, to read, a book recommended, it would seem, by that colossal fellow. He regards, or so they tell me, its author, one Bergotte, Esquire, as a subtle scribe, more subtle, indeed, than any beast of the field; and, albeit he exhibits on occasion a critical pacifism, a tenderness in suffering fools, for which it is impossible to account, and hard to make allowance, still his word has weight with me as it were the Delphic Oracle. Read you then this lyrical prose, and, if the Titanic master-builder of rhythm who composed *Bhagavat* and the *Lévrier de Magnus* speaks not falsely, then, by Apollo, you may taste, even you, my master, the ambrosial joys of Olympus." It was in an ostensible vein of sarcasm that he had asked me to call him, and that he himself called me, "my master." But, as a matter of fact, we each derived a certain amount of satisfaction from the mannerism, being still at the age in which one believes that one gives a thing real existence by giving it a name.

Unfortunately I was not able to set at rest, by further talks with Bloch, in which I might have insisted upon an explanation, the doubts he had engendered in me when he told me that fine lines of poetry (from which I, if you please, expected nothing less than the revelation of truth itself) were all the finer if they meant absolutely nothing. For, as it happened, Bloch was not invited to the house again. At first, he had been well received there. It is true that my grandfather made out that, whenever I formed a strong attachment to any one of my friends and brought him home with me, that friend was invariably a Jew; to which he would not have objected on principle—indeed his own friend Swann was of Jewish extraction—had he not found that the Jews whom I chose as friends were not usually of the best type. And so I was hardly ever able to bring a new friend home without my grandfather's humming the "O, God of our fathers" from *La Juive,* or else "Israel, break thy chain," singing the tune alone, of course, to an "um-ti-tum-ti-tum, tra-la"; but I used to be afraid of my friend's recognising the sound, and so being able to reconstruct the words.

Before seeing them, merely on hearing their names, about which, as often as not, there was nothing particularly Hebraic, he would divine not only the Jewish origin of such of my friends as might indeed be of the chosen people, but even some dark secret which was hidden in their family.

"And what do they call your friend who is coming this evening?"

"Dumont, grandpapa."

"Dumont! Oh, I'm frightened of Dumont."

And he would sing:

> Archers, be on your guard!
> Watch without rest, without sound,

and then, after a few adroit questions on points of detail, he would call out "On guard! on guard," or, if it were the victim himself who had already arrived, and had been obliged, unconsciously, by my grandfather's subtle examination, to admit his origin, then my grandfather, to shew us that he had no longer any doubts, would merely look at us, humming almost inaudibly the air of

> What! do you hither guide the feet
> Of this timid Israelite?

or of

> Sweet vale of Hebron, dear paternal fields,

or, perhaps, of

> Yes, I am of the chosen race.

These little eccentricities on my grandfather's part implied no ill-will whatsoever towards my friends. But Bloch had displeased my family for other reasons. He had begun by annoying my father, who, seeing him come in with wet clothes, had asked him with keen interest:

"Why, M. Bloch, is there a change in the weather; has it been raining? I can't understand it; the barometer has been 'set fair.' "

Which drew from Bloch nothing more instructive than "Sir, I am absolutely incapable of telling you whether it has rained. I live so resolutely apart from physical contingencies that my senses no longer trouble to inform me of them."

"My poor boy," said my father after Bloch had gone, "your friend is out of his mind. Why, he couldn't even tell me what the weather was like. As if there could be anything more interesting! He is an imbecile."

Next, Bloch had displeased my grandmother because, after luncheon, when she complained of not feeling very well, he had stifled a sob and wiped the tears from his eyes.

"You cannot imagine that he is sincere," she observed to me. "Why, he doesn't know me. Unless he's mad, of course."

And finally he had upset the whole household when he arrived an hour and a half late for luncheon and covered with mud from head to foot, and made not the least apology, saying merely: "I never allow myself to be influenced in the smallest degree either by atmospheric disturbances or by the arbitrary divisions of what is known as Time. I would willingly reintroduce to society the opium pipe of China or the Malayan kriss, but I am wholly and entirely without instruction in those infinitely more pernicious (besides being quite bleakly bourgeois) implements, the umbrella and the watch."

In spite of all this he would still have been received at Combray. He was, of course, hardly the friend my parents would have chosen for me; they had, in the end, decided that the tears which he had shed on hearing of my grandmother's illness were genuine enough; but they knew, either instinctively or from their own experience, that our early impulsive emotions have but little influence over our later actions and the conduct of our lives; and that regard for moral obligations, loyalty to our friends, patience in finishing our work, obedience to a rule of life, have a surer foundation in habits solidly formed and blindly followed than in these momentary transports, ardent but sterile. They would have preferred to Bloch, as companions for myself, boys who would have given me no more than it is proper, by all the laws of middle-class morality, for boys to give one another, who would not unexpectedly send me a basket of fruit because they happened, that morning, to have thought of me with affection, but who, since they were incapable of inclining in my favour, by any single impulse of their imagination and emotions, the exact balance of the duties and claims of friendship, were as incapable of loading the scales to my prejudice. Even the injuries we do them will not easily divert from the path of their duty towards us those conventional natures of which my great-aunt furnished a type: who, after quarrelling for years with a niece, to whom she never spoke again, yet made no change in the will in which she had left that niece the whole of her fortune, because she was her next-of-kin, and it was the 'proper thing' to do.

But I was fond of Bloch; my parents wished me to be happy; and the insoluble problems which I set myself on such texts as the 'absolutely meaningless' beauty of *La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaë* tired me more and made me more unwell than I should have been after further talks with him, unwholesome as those talks might seem to my mother's mind. And he would still have been received at Combray but for one thing. That same night, after dinner, having informed me (a piece of news which had a great influence on my later life, making it happier at one time and then more unhappy) that no woman ever thought of anything but love, and that there was not one of them whose resistance a man could not overcome, he had gone on to assure me that he had heard it said on unimpeachable authority that my great-aunt herself had led a 'gay' life in her younger days, and had been notoriously 'kept.' I could not refrain from passing on so important a piece of information to my parents; the next time Bloch called he was not admitted, and afterwards, when I met him in the street, he greeted me with extreme coldness.

But in the matter of Bergotte he had spoken truly.

For the first few days, like a tune which will be running in one's head and maddening one soon enough, but of which one has not for the moment 'got hold,' the things I was to love so passionately in Bergotte's style had not yet caught my eye. I could not, it is true, lay down the novel of his which I was reading, but I fancied that I was interested in the story alone, as in the first dawn of love, when we go every day to meet a woman at some party or entertainment by the charm of which we imagine it is that we are attracted. Then I observed the rare, almost archaic phrases which he liked to employ at certain points, where a hidden flow of harmony, a prelude contained and concealed in the work itself would animate and elevate his style; and it was at such points as these, too, that he would begin to speak of the "vain dream of life," of the "inexhaustible torrent of fair forms," of the "sterile, splendid torture of understanding and loving," of the "moving effigies which ennoble for all time the charming and venerable fronts of our cathedrals"; that he would express a whole system of philosophy, new to me, by the use of marvellous imagery, to the inspiration of which I would naturally have ascribed that sound of harping which began to chime and echo in my ears, an accompaniment to which that imagery added something ethereal and sublime. One of these passages of Bergotte, the third or fourth which I had detached from the rest, filled me with a joy to which the meagre joy I had tasted in the first passage bore no comparison, a joy which I felt myself to have experienced in some innermost chamber of my soul, deep, undivided, vast, from which all obstructions and partitions seemed to have been swept away. For what had happened was that, while I recognised in this passage the same taste for uncommon phrases, the same bursts of music, the same idealist philosophy which had been present in the earlier passages without my having taken them into account as the source of my pleasure, I now no longer had the impression of being confronted by a particular passage in one of Bergotte's works, which traced a purely bi-dimensional figure in outline upon the surface of my mind, but rather of the 'ideal passage' of Bergotte, common to every one of his books, and to which all the earlier, similar passages, now becoming merged in it, had added a kind of density and volume, by which my own understanding seemed to be enlarged.

I was by no means Bergotte's sole admirer; he was the favourite writer also of a friend of my mother's, a highly literary lady; while Dr. du Boulbon had kept all his patients waiting until he finished Bergotte's latest volume; and it was from his consulting room, and from a house in a park near Combray that some of the first seeds were scattered of that taste for Bergotte, a rare-growth in those days, but now so universally acclimatised that one finds it flowering everywhere throughout Europe and America, and even in the tiniest villages, rare still in its refinement, but in that alone. What my mother's friend, and, it would seem, what Dr. du Boulbon liked above all in the writings of Bergotte was just what I liked, the same flow of melody, the same old-fashioned phrases, and certain others, quite simple and familiar, but so placed by him, in such prominence, as to hint at a particular quality of taste on his part; and also, in the sad parts of his books, a sort of roughness, a tone that was almost harsh. And he himself, no doubt, realised that these were his principal attractions. For in his later books, if he had hit upon some great truth, or upon the name of an historic cathedral, he would break off his narrative, and in an invocation, an apostrophe, a lengthy prayer, would give a free outlet to that effluence which, in the earlier volumes, remained buried beneath the form of his prose, discernible only in a rippling of its surface, and perhaps even more delightful, more harmonious when it was thus veiled from the eye, when the reader could give no precise indication of where the murmur of the current began, or of where it died away. These passages in which he delighted were our favourites also. For my own part I knew all of them by heart. I felt even disappointed when he resumed the thread of his narrative. Whenever he spoke of something whose beauty had until then remained hidden from me, of pine-forests or of hailstorms, of *Notre-Dame de Paris,* of *Athalie,* or of *Phèdre,* by some piece of imagery he would make their beauty explode and drench me with its essence. And so, dimly realising that the universe contained innumerable elements which my feeble senses would be powerless to discern, did he not bring them within my reach, I wished that I might have his opinion, some metaphor of his, upon everything in the world, and especially upon such things as I might have an opportunity, some day, of seeing for myself; and among such things, more particularly still upon some of the historic buildings of France, upon certain views of the sea, because the emphasis with which, in his books, he referred to these shewed that he regarded them as rich in significance and beauty. But, alas, upon almost everything in the world his opinion was unknown to me. I had no doubt that it would differ entirely from my own, since his came down from an unknown sphere towards which I was striving to raise myself; convinced that my thoughts would have seemed pure foolishness to that perfected spirit, I had so completely obliterated them all that, if I happened to find in one of his books something which had already occurred to my own mind, my heart would swell with gratitude and pride as though some deity had, in his infinite bounty, restored it to me, had pronounced it to be beautiful and right. It happened now and then that a page of Bergotte would express precisely those ideas which I used often at night, when I was unable to sleep, to write to my grandmother and mother, and so concisely and well that his page had the appearance of a collection of mottoes for me to set at the head of my letters. And so too, in later years, when I began to compose a book of my own, and the quality of some of my sentences seemed so inadequate that I could not make up my mind to go on with the undertaking, I would find the equivalent of my sentences in Bergotte's. But it was only then, when I read them in his pages, that I could enjoy them; when it was I myself who composed them, in my anxiety that they should exactly reproduce what I seemed to have detected in my mind, and in my fear of their not turning out 'true to life,' I had no time to ask myself whether what I was writing would be pleasant to read! But indeed there was no kind of language, no kind of ideas which I really liked, except these. My feverish and unsatisfactory attempts were themselves a token of my love, a love which brought me no pleasure, but was, for all that, intense and deep. And so, when I came suddenly upon similar phrases in the writings of another, that is to say stripped of their familiar accompaniment of scruples and repressions and self-tormentings, I was free to indulge to the full my own appetite for such things, just as a cook who, once in a while, has no dinner to prepare for other people, can then find time to gormandise himself. And so, when I had found, one day, in a book by Bergotte, some joke about an old family servant, to which his solemn and magnificent style added a great deal of irony, but which was in principle what I had often said to my grandmother about Françoise, and when, another time, I had discovered that he thought not unworthy of reflection in one of those mirrors of absolute Truth which were his writings, a remark similar to one which I had had occasion to make on our friend M. Legrandin (and, moreover, my remarks on Françoise and M. Legrandin were among those which I would most resolutely have sacrificed for Bergotte's sake, in the belief that he would find them quite without interest); then it was suddenly revealed to me that my own humble existence and the Realms of Truth were less widely separated than I had supposed, that at certain points they were actually in contact; and in my new-found confidence and joy I wept upon his printed page, as in the arms of a long-lost father.

From his books I had formed an impression of Bergotte as a frail and disappointed old man, who had lost his children, and had never found any consolation. And so I would read, or rather sing his sentences in my brain, with rather more *dolce,* rather more *lento* than he himself had, perhaps, intended, and his simplest phrase would strike my ears with something peculiarly gentle and loving in its intonation. More than anything else in the world I cherished his philosophy, and had pledged myself to it in lifelong devotion. It made me impatient to reach the age when I should be eligible to attend the class at school called 'Philosophy.' I did not wish to learn or do anything else there, but simply to exist and be guided entirely by the mind of Bergotte, and, if I had been told then that the metaphysicians whom I was actually to follow there resembled him in nothing, I should have been struck down by the despair a young lover feels who has sworn lifelong fidelity, when a friend speaks to him of the other mistresses he will have in time to come.

One Sunday, while I was reading in the garden, I was interrupted by Swann, who had come to call upon my parents.

"What are you reading? May I look? Why, it's Bergotte! Who has been telling you about him?"

I replied that Bloch was responsible.

"Oh, yes, that boy I saw here once, who looks so like the Bellini portrait of Mahomet II. It's an astonishing likeness; he has the same arched eyebrows and hooked nose and prominent cheekbones. When his beard comes he'll be Mahomet himself. Anyhow he has good taste, for Bergotte is a charming creature." And seeing how much I seemed to admire Bergotte, Swann, who never spoke at all about the people he knew, made an exception in my favour and said: "I know him well; if you would like him to write a few words on the title-page of your book I could ask him for you."

I dared not accept such an offer, but bombarded Swann with questions about his friend. "Can you tell me, please, who is his favourite actor?"

"Actor? No, I can't say. But I do know this: there's not a man on the stage whom he thinks equal to Berma; he puts her above everyone. Have you seen her?"

"No, sir, my parents do not allow me to go to the theatre."

"That is a pity. You should insist. Berma in *Phèdre,* in the *Cid;* well, she's only an actress, if you like, but you know that I don't believe very much in the 'hierarchy' of the arts." As he spoke I noticed, what had often struck me before in his conversations with my grandmother's sisters, that whenever he spoke of serious matters, whenever he used an expression which seemed to imply a definite opinion upon some important subject, he would take care to isolate, to sterilise it by using a special intonation, mechanical and ironic, as though he had put the phrase or word between inverted commas, and was anxious to disclaim any personal responsibility for it; as who should say "the 'hierarchy,' don't you know, as silly people call it." But then, if it was so absurd, why did he say the 'hierarchy'? A moment later he went on: "Her acting will give you as noble an inspiration as any masterpiece of art in the world, as—oh, I don't know—" and he began to laugh, "shall we say the Queens of Chartres?" Until then I had supposed that his horror of having to give a serious opinion was something Parisian and refined, in contrast to the provincial dogmatism of my grandmother's sisters; and I had imagined also that it was characteristic of the mental attitude towards life of the circle in which Swann moved, where, by a natural reaction from the 'lyrical' enthusiasms of earlier generations, an excessive importance was given to small and precise facts, formerly regarded as vulgar, and anything in the nature of 'phrase-making' was banned. But now I found myself slightly shocked by this attitude which Swann invariably adopted when face to face with generalities. He appeared unwilling to risk even having an opinion, and to be at his ease only when he could furnish, with meticulous accuracy, some precise but unimportant detail. But in so doing he did not take into account that even here he was giving an opinion, holding a brief (as they say) for something, that the accuracy of his details had an importance of its own. I thought again of the dinner that night, when I had been so unhappy because Mamma would not be coming up to my room, and when he had dismissed the balls given by the Princesse de Léon as being of no importance. And yet it was to just that sort of amusement that he was devoting his life. For what other kind of existence did he reserve the duties of saying in all seriousness what he thought about things, of formulating judgments which he would not put between inverted commas; and when would he cease to give himself up to occupations of which at the same time he made out that they were absurd? I noticed, too, in the manner in which Swann spoke to me of Bergotte, something which, to do him justice, was not peculiar to himself, but was shared by all that writer's admirers at that time, at least by my mother's friend and by Dr. du Boulbon. Like Swann, they would say of Bergotte: "He has a charming mind, so individual, he has a way of his own of saying things, which is a little far-fetched, but so pleasant. You never need to look for his name on the title-page, you can tell his work at once." But none of them had yet gone so far as to say "He is a great writer, he has great talent." They did not even credit him with talent at all. They did not speak, because they were not aware of it. We are very slow in recognising in the peculiar physiognomy of a new writer the type which is labelled 'great talent' in our museum of general ideas. Simply because that physiognomy is new and strange, we can find in it no resemblance to what we are accustomed to call talent. We say rather originality, charm, delicacy, strength; and then one day we add up the sum of these, and find that it amounts simply to talent.

"Are there any books in which Bergotte has written about Berma?" I asked M. Swann.

"I think he has, in that little essay on Racine, but it must be out of print. Still, there has perhaps been a second impression. I will find out. Anyhow, I can ask Bergotte himself all that you want to know next time he comes to dine with us. He never misses a week, from one year's end to another. He is my daughter's greatest friend. They go about together, and look at old towns and cathedrals and castles."

As I was still completely ignorant of the different grades in the social hierarchy, the fact that my father found it impossible for us to see anything of Swann's wife and daughter had, for a long time, had the contrary effect of making me imagine them as separated from us by an enormous gulf, which greatly enhanced their dignity and importance in my eyes. I was sorry that my mother did not dye her hair and redden her lips, as I had heard our neighbour, Mme. Sazerat, say that Mme. Swann did, to gratify not her husband but M. de Charlus; and I felt that, to her, we must be an object of scorn, which distressed me particularly on account of the daughter, such a pretty little girl, as I had heard, and one of whom I used often to dream, always imagining her with the same features and appearance, which I bestowed upon her quite arbitrarily, but with a charming effect. But from this afternoon, when I had learned that Mlle. Swann was a creature living in such rare and fortunate circumstances, bathed, as in her natural element, in such a sea of privilege that, if she should ask her parents whether anyone were coming to dinner, she would be answered in those two syllables, radiant with celestial light, would hear the name of that golden guest who was to her no more than an old friend of her family, Bergotte; that for her the intimate conversation at table, corresponding to what my great-aunt's conversation was for me, would be the words of Bergotte upon all those subjects which he had not been able to take up in his writings, and on which I would fain have heard him utter oracles; and that, above all, when she went to visit other towns, he would be walking by her side, unrecognised and glorious, like the gods who came down, of old, from heaven to dwell among mortal men: then I realised both the rare worth of a creature such as Mlle. Swann, and, at the same time, how coarse and ignorant I should appear to her; and I felt so keenly how pleasant and yet how impossible it would be for me to become her friend that I was filled at once with longing and with despair. And usually, from this time forth, when I thought of her, I would see her standing before the porch of a cathedral, explaining to me what each of the statues meant, and, with a smile which was my highest commendation, presenting me, as her friend, to Bergotte. And invariably the charm of all the fancies which the thought of cathedrals used to inspire in me, the charm of the hills and valleys of the Ile de France and of the plains of Normandy, would radiate brightness and beauty over the picture I had formed in my mind of Mlle. Swann; nothing more remained but to know and to love her. Once we believe that a fellow-creature has a share in some unknown existence to which that creature's love for ourselves can win us admission, that is, of all the preliminary conditions which Love exacts, the one to which he attaches most importance, the one which makes him generous or indifferent as to the rest. Even those women who pretend that they judge a man by his exterior only, see in that exterior an emanation from some special way of life. And that is why they fall in love with a soldier or a fireman, whose uniform makes them less particular about his face; they kiss and believe that beneath the crushing breastplate there beats a heart different from the rest, more gallant, more adventurous, more tender; and so it is that a young king or a crown prince may travel in foreign countries and make the most gratifying conquests, and yet lack entirely that regular and classic profile which would be indispensable, I dare say, in an outside-broker.

While I was reading in the garden, a thing my great-aunt would never have understood my doing save on a Sunday, that being the day on which it was unlawful to indulge in any serious occupation, and on which she herself would lay aside her sewing (on a week-day she would have said, "How you can go on amusing yourself with a book; it isn't Sunday, you know!" putting into the word 'amusing' an implication of childishness and waste of time), my aunt Léonie would be gossiping with Françoise until it was time for Eulalie to arrive. She would tell her that she had just seen Mme. Goupil go by "without an umbrella, in the silk dress she had made for her the other day at Châteaudun. If she has far to go before vespers, she may get it properly soaked."

"Very likely" (which meant also "very likely not") was the answer, for Françoise did not wish definitely to exclude the possibility of a happier alternative.

"There, now," went on my aunt, beating her brow, "that reminds me that I never heard if she got to church this morning before the Elevation. I must remember to ask Eulalie . . . Françoise, just look at that black cloud behind the steeple, and how poor the light is on the slates, you may be certain it will rain before the day is out. It couldn't possibly keep on like this, it's been too hot. And the sooner the better, for until the storm breaks my Vichy water won't 'go down,' " she concluded, since, in her mind, the desire to accelerate the digestion of her Vichy water was of infinitely greater importance than her fear of seeing Mme. Goupil's new dress ruined.

"Very likely."

"And you know that when it rains in the Square there's none too much shelter." Suddenly my aunt turned pale. "What, three o'clock!" she exclaimed. "But vespers will have begun already, and I've forgotten my pepsin! Now I know why that Vichy water has been lying on my stomach." And falling precipitately upon a prayer-book bound in purple velvet, with gilt clasps, out of which in her haste she let fall a shower of the little pictures, each in a lace fringe of yellowish paper, which she used to mark the places of the greater feasts of the church, my aunt, while she swallowed her drops, began at full speed to mutter the words of the sacred text, its meaning being slightly clouded in her brain by the uncertainty whether the pepsin, when taken so long after the Vichy, would still be able to overtake it and to 'send it down.' "Three o'clock! It's unbelievable how time flies."

A little tap at the window, as though some missile had struck it, followed by a plentiful, falling sound, as light, though, as if a shower of sand were being sprinkled from a window overhead; then the fall spread, took on an order, a rhythm, became liquid, loud, drumming, musical, innumerable, universal. It was the rain.

"There, Françoise, what did I tell you? How it's coming down! But I think I heard the bell at the garden gate: go along and see who can be outside in this weather."

Françoise went and returned. "It's Mme. Amédée" (my grandmother). "She said she was going for a walk. It's raining hard, all the same."

"I'm not at all surprised," said my aunt, looking up towards the sky. "I've always said that she was not in the least like other people. Well, I'm glad it's she and not myself who's outside in all this."

"Mme. Amédée is always the exact opposite of the rest," said Françoise, not unkindly, refraining until she should be alone with the other servants from stating her belief that my grandmother was 'a bit off her head.'

"There's Benediction over! Eulalie will never come now," sighed my aunt. "It will be the weather that's frightened her away."

"But it's not five o'clock yet, Mme. Octave, it's only half-past four."

"Only half-past four! And here am I, obliged to draw back the small curtains, just to get a tiny streak of daylight. At half-past four! Only a week before the Rogation-days. Ah, my poor Françoise, the dear Lord must be sorely vexed with us. The world is going too far in these days. As my poor Octave used to say, we have forgotten God too often, and He is taking vengeance upon us."

A bright flush animated my aunt's cheeks; it was Eulalie. As ill luck would have it, scarcely had she been admitted to the presence when Françoise reappeared and, with a smile which was meant to indicate her full participation in the pleasure which, she had no doubt, her tidings would give my aunt, articulating each syllable so as to shew that, in spite of her having to translate them into indirect speech, she was repeating, as a good servant should, the very words which the new visitor had condescended to use, said: "His reverence the Curé would be delighted, enchanted, if Mme. Octave is not resting just now, and could see him. His reverence does not wish to disturb Mme. Octave. His reverence is downstairs; I told him to go into the parlour."

Had the truth been known, the Curé's visits gave my aunt no such ecstatic pleasure as Françoise supposed, and the air of jubilation with which she felt bound to illuminate her face whenever she had to announce his arrival, did not altogether correspond to what was felt by her invalid. The Curé (an excellent man, with whom I am sorry now that I did not converse more often, for, even if he cared nothing for the arts, he knew a great many etymologies), being in the habit of shewing distinguished visitors over his church (he had even planned to compile a history of the Parish of Combray), used to weary her with his endless explanations, which, incidentally, never varied in the least degree. But when his visit synchronized exactly with Eulalie's it became frankly distasteful to my aunt. She would have preferred to make the most of Eulalie, and not to have had the whole of her circle about her at one time. But she dared not send the Curé away, and had to content herself with making a sign to Eulalie not to leave when he did, so that she might have her to herself for a little after he had gone.

"What is this I have been hearing, Father, that a painter has set up his easel in your church, and is copying one of the windows? Old as I am, I can safely say that I have never even heard of such a thing in all my life! What is the world coming to next, I wonder! And the ugliest thing in the whole church, too."

"I will not go so far as to say that it is quite the ugliest, for, although there are certain things in Saint-Hilaire which are well worth a visit, there are others that are very old now, in my poor basilica, the only one in all the diocese that has never even been restored. The Lord knows, our porch is dirty and out of date; still, it is of a majestic character; take, for instance, the Esther tapestries, though personally I would not give a brass farthing for the pair of them, but experts put them next after the ones at Sens. I can quite see, too, that apart from certain details which are—well, a trifle realistic, they shew features which testify to a genuine power of observation. But don't talk to me about the windows. Is it common sense, I ask you, to leave up windows which shut out all the daylight, and even confuse the eyes by throwing patches of colour, to which I should be hard put to it to give a name, on a floor in which there are not two slabs on the same level? And yet they refuse to renew the floor for me because, if you please, those are the tombstones of the Abbots of Combray and the Lords of Guermantes, the old Counts, you know, of Brabant, direct ancestors of the present Duc de Guermantes, and of his Duchesse also, since she was a lady of the Guermantes family, and married her cousin." (My grandmother, whose steady refusal to take any interest in 'persons' had ended in her confusing all their names and titles, whenever anyone mentioned the Duchesse de Guermantes used to make out that she must be related to Mme. de Villeparisis. The whole family would then burst out laughing; and she would attempt to justify herself by harking back to some invitation to a christening or funeral: "I feel sure that there was a Guermantes in it somewhere." And for once I would side with the others, and against her, refusing to admit that there could be any connection between her school-friend and the descendant of Geneviève de Brabant.)

"Look at Roussainville," the Curé went on. "It is nothing more nowadays than a parish of farmers, though in olden times the place must have had a considerable importance from its trade in felt hats and clocks. (I am not certain, by the way, of the etymology of Roussainville. I should dearly like to think that the name was originally Rouville, from *Radulfi villa,* analogous, don't you see, to Châteauroux, *Castrum Radulfi,* but we will talk about that some other time.) Very well; the church there has superb windows, almost all quite modern, including that most imposing 'Entry of Louis-Philippe into Combray' which would be more in keeping, surely, at Combray itself, and which is every bit as good, I understand, as the famous windows at Chartres. Only yesterday I met Dr. Percepied's brother, who goes in for these things, and he told me that he looked upon it as a most beautiful piece of work. But, as I said to this artist, who, by the way, seems to be a most civil fellow, and is a regular virtuoso, it appears, with his brush; what on earth, I said to him, do you find so extraordinary in this window, which is, if anything, a little dingier than the rest?"

"I am sure that if you were to ask his Lordship," said my aunt in a resigned tone, for she had begun to feel that she was going to be 'tired,' "he would never refuse you a new window."

"You may depend upon it, Mme. Octave," replied the Curé. "Why, it was just his Lordship himself who started the outcry about the window, by proving that it represented Gilbert the Bad, a Lord of Guermantes and a direct descendant of Geneviève de Brabant, who was a daughter of the House of Guermantes, receiving absolution from Saint Hilaire."

"But I don't see where Saint Hilaire comes in."

"Why yes, have you never noticed, in the corner of the window, a lady in a yellow robe? Very well, that is Saint Hilaire, who is also known, you will remember, in certain parts of the country as Saint Illiers, Saint Hèlier, and even, in the Jura, Saint Ylie. But these various corruptions of *Sanctus Hilarius* are by no means the most curious that have occurred in the names of the blessed Saints. Take, for example, my good Eulalie, the case of your own patron, *Sancta Eulalia;* do you know what she has become in Burgundy? Saint Eloi, nothing more nor less! The lady has become a gentleman. Do you hear that, Eulalie, after you are dead they will make a man of you!"

"Father will always have his joke."

"Gilbert's brother, Charles the Stammerer, was a pious prince, but, having early in life lost his father, Pepin the Mad, who died as a result of his mental infirmity, he wielded the supreme power with all the arrogance of a man who has not been subjected to discipline in his youth, so much so that, whenever he saw a man in a town whose face he did not remember, he would massacre the whole place, to the last inhabitant. Gilbert, wishing to be avenged on Charles, caused the church at Combray to be burned down, the original church, that was, which Théodebert, when he and his court left the country residence he had near here, at Thiberzy (which is, of course, *Theodeberiacus*), to go out and fight the Burgundians, had promised to build over the tomb of Saint Hilaire if the Saint brought him victory. Nothing remains of it now but the crypt, into which Théodore has probably taken you, for Gilbert burned all the rest. Finally, he defeated the unlucky Charles with the aid of William" which the Curé pronounced "Will'am" "the Conqueror, which is why so many English still come to visit the place. But he does not appear to have managed to win the affection of the people of Combray, for they fell upon him as he was coming out from mass, and cut off his head. Théodore has a little book, that he lends people, which tells you the whole story.

"But what is unquestionably the most remarkable thing about our church is the view from the belfry, which is full of grandeur. Certainly in your case, since you are not very strong, I should never recommend you to climb our seven and ninety steps, just half the number they have in the famous cathedral at Milan. It is quite tiring enough for the most active person, especially as you have to go on your hands and knees, if you don't wish to crack your skull, and you collect all the cobwebs off the staircase upon your clothes. In any case you should be well wrapped up," he went on, without noticing my aunt's fury at the mere suggestion that she could ever, possibly, be capable of climbing into his belfry, "for there's a strong breeze there, once you get to the top. Some people even assure me that they have felt the chill of death up there. No matter, on Sundays there are always clubs and societies, who come, some of them, long distances to admire our beautiful panorama, and they always go home charmed. Wait now, next Sunday, if the weather holds, you will be sure to find a lot of people there, for Rogation-tide. You must admit, certainly, that the view from up there is like a fairy-tale, with what you might call vistas along the plain, which have quite a special charm of their own. On a clear day you can see as far as Verneuil. And then another thing; you can see at the same time places which you are in the habit of seeing one without the other, as, for instance, the course of the Vivonne and the ditches at Saint-Assise-lès-Combray, which are separated, really, by a screen of tall trees; or, to take another example, there are all the canals at Jouy-le-Vicomte, which is *Gaudiacus vicecomitis,* as of course you know. Each time that I have been to Jouy I have seen a bit of a canal in one place, and then I have turned a corner and seen another, but when I saw the second I could no longer see the first. I tried in vain to imagine how they lay by one another; it was no good. But, from the top of Saint-Hilaire, it's quite another matter; the whole countryside is spread out before you like a map. Only, you cannot make out the water; you would say that there were great rifts in the town, slicing it up so neatly that it looks like a loaf of bread which still holds together after it has been cut up. To get it all quite perfect you would have to be in both places at once; up here on the top of Saint-Hilaire and down there at Jouy-le-Vicomte."

The Curé had so much exhausted my aunt that no sooner had he gone than she was obliged to send away Eulalie also.

"Here, my poor Eulalie," she said in a feeble voice, drawing a coin from a small purse which lay ready to her hand. "This is just something so that you shall not forget me in your prayers."

"Oh, but, Mme. Octave, I don't think I ought to; you know very well that I don't come here for that!" So Eulalie would answer, with the same hesitation and the same embarrassment, every Sunday, as though each temptation were the first, and with a look of displeasure which enlivened my aunt and never offended her, for if it so happened that Eulalie, when she took the money, looked a little less sulky than usual, my aunt would remark afterwards, "I cannot think what has come over Eulalie; I gave her just the trifle I always give, and she did not look at all pleased."

"I don't think she has very much to complain of, all the same," Françoise would sigh grimly, for she had a tendency to regard as petty cash all that my aunt might give her for herself or her children, and as treasure riotously squandered on a pampered and ungrateful darling the little coins slipped, Sunday by Sunday, into Eulalie's hand, but so discreetly passed that Françoise never managed to see them. It was not that she wanted to have for herself the money my aunt bestowed on Eulalie. She already enjoyed a sufficiency of all that my aunt possessed, in the knowledge that the wealth of the mistress automatically ennobled and glorified the maid in the eyes of the world; and that she herself was conspicuous and worthy to be praised throughout Combray, Jouy-le-Vicomte, and other cities of men, on account of my aunt's many farms, her frequent and prolonged visits from the Curé, and the astonishing number of bottles of Vichy water which she consumed. Françoise was avaricious only for my aunt; had she had control over my aunt's fortune (which would have more than satisfied her highest ambition) she would have guarded it from the assaults of strangers with a maternal ferocity. She would, however, have seen no great harm in what my aunt, whom she knew to be incurably generous, allowed herself to give away, had she given only to those who were already rich. Perhaps she felt that such persons, not being actually in need of my aunt's presents, could not be suspected of simulating affection for her on that account. Besides, presents offered to persons of great wealth and position, such as Mme. Sazerat, M. Swann, M. Legrandin and Mme. Goupil, to persons of the 'same class' as my aunt, and who would naturally 'mix with her,' seemed to Françoise to be included among the ornamental customs of that strange and brilliant life led by rich people, who hunted and shot, gave balls and paid visits, a life which she would contemplate with an admiring smile. But it was by no means the same thing if, for this princely exchange of courtesies, my aunt substituted mere charity, if her beneficiaries were of the class which Françoise would label "people like myself," or "people no better than myself," people whom she despised even more if they did not address her always as "Mme. Françoise," just to shew that they considered themselves to be 'not as good.' And when she saw that, despite all her warnings, my aunt continued to do exactly as she pleased, and to fling money away with both hands (or so, at least, Françoise believed) on undeserving objects, she began to find that the presents she herself received from my aunt were very tiny compared to the imaginary riches squandered upon Eulalie. There was not, in the neighbourhood of Combray, a farm of such prosperity and importance that Françoise doubted Eulalie's ability to buy it, without thinking twice, out of the capital which her visits to my aunt had 'brought in.' It must be added that Eulalie had formed an exactly similar estimate of the vast and secret hoards of Françoise. So, every Sunday, after Eulalie had gone, Françoise would mercilessly prophesy her coming downfall. She hated Eulalie, but was at the same time afraid of her, and so felt bound, when Eulalie was there, to 'look pleasant.' But she would make up for that after the other's departure; never, it is true, alluding to her by name, but hinting at her in Sibylline oracles, or in utterances of a comprehensive character, like those of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher, but so worded that their special application could not escape my aunt. After peering out at the side of the curtain to see whether Eulalie had shut the front-door behind her; "Flatterers know how to make themselves welcome, and to gather up the crumbs; but have patience, have patience; our God is a jealous God, and one fine day He will be avenged upon them!" she would declaim, with the sidelong, insinuating glance of Joash, thinking of Athaliah alone when he says that the

prosperity
Of wicked men runs like a torrent past,
And soon is spent.

But on this memorable afternoon, when the Curé had come as well, and by his interminable visit had drained my aunt's strength, Françoise followed Eulalie from the room, saying: "Mme. Octave, I will leave you to rest; you look utterly tired out."

And my aunt answered her not a word, breathing a sigh so faint that it seemed it must prove her last, and lying there with closed eyes, as though already dead. But hardly had Françoise arrived downstairs, when four peals of a bell, pulled with the utmost violence, reverberated through the house, and my aunt, sitting erect upon her bed, called out: "Has Eulalie gone yet? Would you believe it; I forgot to ask her whether Mme. Goupil arrived in church before the Elevation. Run after her, quick!"

But Françoise returned alone, having failed to overtake Eulalie.

"It is most provoking," said my aunt, shaking her head. "The one important thing that I had to ask her."

In this way life went by for my aunt Léonie, always the same, in the gentle uniformity of what she called, with a pretence of deprecation but with a deep tenderness, her 'little jog-trot.' Respected by all and sundry, not merely in her own house, where every one of us, having learned the futility of recommending any healthier mode of life, had become gradually resigned to its observance, but in the village as well, where, three streets away, a tradesman who had to hammer nails into a packing-case would send first to Françoise to make sure that my aunt was not 'resting'—her 'little jog-trot' was, none the less, brutally disturbed on one occasion in this same year. Like a fruit hidden among its leaves, which has grown and ripened unobserved by man, until it falls of its own accord, there came upon us one night the kitchen-maid's confinement. Her pains were unbearable, and, as there was no midwife in Combray, Françoise had to set off before dawn to fetch one from Thiberzy. My aunt was unable to 'rest,' owing to the cries of the girl, and as Françoise, though the distance was nothing, was very late in returning, her services were greatly missed. And so, in the course of the morning, my mother said to me: "Run upstairs, and see if your aunt wants anything."

I went into the first of her two rooms, and through the open door of the other saw my aunt lying on her side, asleep. I could hear her breathing, in what was almost distinguishable as a snore. I was just going to slip away when something, probably the sound of my entry, interrupted her sleep, and made it 'change speed,' as they say of motorcars nowadays, for the music of her snore broke off for a second and began again on a lower note; then she awoke, and half turned her face, which I could see for the first time; a kind of horror was imprinted on it; plainly she had just escaped from some terrifying dream. She could not see me from where she was lying, and I stood there not knowing whether I ought to go forward or to retire; but all at once she seemed to return to a sense of reality, and to grasp the falsehood of the visions that had terrified her; a smile of joy, a pious act of thanksgiving to God, Who is pleased to grant that life shall be less cruel than our dreams, feebly illumined her face, and, with the habit she had formed of speaking to herself, half-aloud, when she thought herself alone, she murmured: "The Lord be praised! We have nothing to disturb us here but the kitchen-maid's baby. And I've been dreaming that my poor Octave had come back to life, and was trying to make me take a walk every day!" She stretched out a hand towards her rosary, which was lying on the small table, but sleep was once again getting the mastery, and did not leave her the strength to reach it; she fell asleep, calm and contented, and I crept out of the room on tiptoe, without either her or anyone's else ever knowing, from that day to this, what I had seen and heard.

When I say that, apart from such rare happenings as this confinement, my aunt's 'little jog-trot' never underwent any variation, I do not include those variations which, repeated at regular intervals and in identical form, did no more, really, than print a sort of uniform pattern upon the greater uniformity of her life. So, for instance, every Saturday, as Françoise had to go in the afternoon to market at Roussainville-le-Pin, the whole household would have to have luncheon an hour earlier. And my aunt had so thoroughly acquired the habit of this weekly exception to her general habits, that she clung to it as much as to the rest. She was so well 'routined' to it, as Françoise would say, that if, on a Saturday, she had had to wait for her luncheon until the regular hour, it would have 'upset' her as much as if she had had, on an ordinary day, to put her luncheon forward to its Saturday time. Incidentally this acceleration of luncheon gave Saturday, for all of us, an individual character, kindly and rather attractive. At the moment when, ordinarily, there was still an hour to be lived through before meal-time sounded, we would all know that in a few seconds we should see the endives make their precocious appearance, followed by the special favour of an omelette, an unmerited steak. The return of this asymmetrical Saturday was one of those petty occurrences, intra-mural, localised, almost civic, which, in uneventful lives and stable orders of society, create a kind of national unity, and become the favourite theme for conversation, for pleasantries, for anecdotes which can be embroidered as the narrator pleases; it would have provided a nucleus, ready-made, for a legendary cycle, if any of us had had the epic mind. At daybreak, before we were dressed, without rhyme or reason, save for the pleasure of proving the strength of our solidarity, we would call to one another good-humoredly, cordially, patriotically, "Hurry up; there's no time to be lost; don't forget, it's Saturday!" while my aunt, gossiping with Françoise, and reflecting that the day would be even longer than usual, would say, "You might cook them a nice bit of veal, seeing that it's Saturday." If, at half-past ten, some one absent-mindedly pulled out a watch and said, "I say, an hour-and-a-half still before luncheon," everyone else would be in ecstasies over being able to retort at once: "Why, what are you thinking about? Have you forgotten that it's Saturday?" And a quarter of an hour later we would still be laughing, and reminding ourselves to go up and tell aunt Léonie about this absurd mistake, to amuse her. The very face of the sky appeared to undergo a change. After luncheon the sun, conscious that it was Saturday, would blaze an hour longer in the zenith, and when some one, thinking that we were late in starting for our walk, said, "What, only two o'clock!" feeling the heavy throb go by him of the twin strokes from the steeple of Saint-Hilaire (which as a rule passed no one at that hour upon the highways, deserted for the midday meal or for the nap which follows it, or on the banks of the bright and ever-flowing stream, which even the angler had abandoned, and so slipped unaccompanied into the vacant sky, where only a few loitering clouds remained to greet them) the whole family would respond in chorus: "Why, you're forgetting; we had luncheon an hour earlier; you know very well it's Saturday."

The surprise of a 'barbarian' (for so we termed everyone who was not acquainted with Saturday's special customs) who had called at eleven o'clock to speak to my father, and had found us at table, was an event which used to cause Françoise as much merriment as, perhaps, anything that had ever happened in her life. And if she found it amusing that the nonplussed visitor should not have known, beforehand, that we had our luncheon an hour earlier on Saturday, it was still more irresistibly funny that my father himself (fully as she sympathised, from the bottom of her heart, with the rigid chauvinism which prompted him) should never have dreamed that the barbarian could fail to be aware of so simple a matter, and so had replied, with no further enlightenment of the other's surprise at seeing us already in the dining-room: "You see, it's Saturday." On reaching this point in the story, Françoise would pause to wipe the tears of merriment from her eyes, and then, to add to her own enjoyment, would prolong the dialogue, inventing a further reply for the visitor to whom the word 'Saturday' had conveyed nothing. And so far from our objecting to these interpolations, we would feel that the story was not yet long enough, and would rally her with: "Oh, but surely he said something else as well. There was more than that, the first time you told it."

My great-aunt herself would lay aside her work, and raise her head and look on at us over her glasses.

The day had yet another characteristic feature, namely, that during May we used to go out on Saturday evenings after dinner to the 'Month of Mary' devotions.

As we were liable, there, to meet M. Vinteuil, who held very strict views on "the deplorable untidiness of young people, which seems to be encouraged in these days," my mother would first see that there was nothing out of order in my appearance, and then we would set out for the church. It was in these 'Month of Mary' services that I can remember having first fallen in love with hawthorn-blossom. The hawthorn was not merely in the church, for there, holy ground as it was, we had all of us a right of entry; but, arranged upon the altar itself, inseparable from the mysteries in whose celebration it was playing a part, it thrust in among the tapers and the sacred vessels its rows of branches, tied to one another horizontally in a stiff, festal scheme of decoration; and they were made more lovely still by the scalloped outline of the dark leaves, over which were scattered in profusion, as over a bridal train, little clusters of buds of a dazzling whiteness. Though I dared not look at them save through my fingers, I could feel that the formal scheme was composed of living things, and that it was Nature herself who, by trimming the shape of the foliage, and by adding the crowning ornament of those snowy buds, had made the decorations worthy of what was at once a public rejoicing and a solemn mystery. Higher up on the altar, a flower had opened here and there with a careless grace, holding so unconcernedly, like a final, almost vaporous bedizening, its bunch of stamens, slender as gossamer, which clouded the flower itself in a white mist, that in following these with my eyes, in trying to imitate, somewhere inside myself, the action of their blossoming, I imagined it as a swift and thoughtless movement of the head with an enticing glance from her contracted pupils, by a young girl in white, careless and alive.

M. Vinteuil had come in with his daughter and had sat down beside us. He belonged to a good family, and had once been music-master to my grandmother's sisters; so that when, after losing his wife and inheriting some property, he had retired to the neighbourhood of Combray, we used often to invite him to our house. But with his intense prudishness he had given up coming, so as not to be obliged to meet Swann, who had made what he called "a most unsuitable marriage, as seems to be the fashion in these days." My mother, on hearing that he 'composed,' told him by way of a compliment that, when she came to see him, he must play her something of his own. M. Vinteuil would have liked nothing better, but he carried politeness and consideration for others to so fine a point, always putting himself in their place, that he was afraid of boring them, or of appearing egotistical, if he carried out, or even allowed them to suspect what were his own desires. On the day when my parents had gone to pay him a visit, I had accompanied them, but they had allowed me to remain outside, and as M. Vinteuil's house, Montjouvain, stood on a site actually hollowed out from a steep hill covered with shrubs, among which I took cover, I had found myself on a level with his drawing-room, upstairs, and only a few feet away from its window. When a servant came in to tell him that my parents had arrived, I had seen M. Vinteuil run to the piano and lay out a sheet of music so as to catch the eye. But as soon as they entered the room he had snatched it away and hidden it in a corner. He was afraid, no doubt, of letting them suppose that he was glad to see them only because it gave him a chance of playing them some of his compositions. And every time that my mother, in the course of her visit, had returned to the subject of his playing, he had hurriedly protested: "I cannot think who put that on the piano; it is not the proper place for it at all," and had turned the conversation aside to other topics, simply because those were of less interest to himself.

His one and only passion was for his daughter, and she, with her somewhat boyish appearance, looked so robust that it was hard to restrain a smile when one saw the precautions her father used to take for her health, with spare shawls always in readiness to wrap around her shoulders. My grandmother had drawn our attention to the gentle, delicate, almost timid expression which might often be caught flitting across the face, dusted all over with freckles, of this otherwise stolid child. When she had spoken, she would at once take her own words in the sense in which her audience must have heard them, she would be alarmed at the possibility of a misunderstanding, and one would see, in clear outline, as though in a transparency, beneath the mannish face of the 'good sort' that she was, the finer features of a young woman in tears.

When, before turning to leave the church, I made a genuflection before the altar, I felt suddenly, as I rose again, a bitter-sweet fragrance of almonds steal towards me from the hawthorn-blossom, and I then noticed that on the flowers themselves were little spots of a creamier colour, in which I imagined that this fragrance must lie concealed, as the taste of an almond cake lay in the burned parts, or the sweetness of Mlle. Vinteuil's cheeks beneath their freckles. Despite the heavy, motionless silence of the hawthorns, these gusts of fragrance came to me like the murmuring of an intense vitality, with which the whole altar was quivering like a roadside hedge explored by living antennae, of which I was reminded by seeing some stamens, almost red in colour, which seemed to have kept the springtime virulence, the irritant power of stinging insects now transmuted into flowers.

Outside the church we would stand talking for a moment with M. Vinteuil, in the porch. Boys would be chevying one another in the Square, and he would interfere, taking the side of the little ones and lecturing the big. If his daughter said, in her thick, comfortable voice, how glad she had been to see us, immediately it would seem as though some elder and more sensitive sister, latent in her, had blushed at this thoughtless, schoolboyish utterance, which had, perhaps, made us think that she was angling for an invitation to the house. Her father would then arrange a cloak over her shoulders, they would clamber into a little dog-cart which she herself drove, and home they would both go to Montjouvain. As for ourselves, the next day being Sunday, with no need to be up and stirring before high mass, if it was a moonlight night and warm, then, instead of taking us home at once, my father, in his thirst for personal distinction, would lead us on a long walk round by the Calvary, which my mother's utter incapacity for taking her bearings, or even for knowing which road she might be on, made her regard as a triumph of his strategic genius. Sometimes we would go as far as the viaduct, which began to stride on its long legs of stone at the railway station, and to me typified all the wretchedness of exile beyond the last outposts of civilisation, because every year, as we came down from Paris, we would be warned to take special care, when we got to Combray, not to miss the station, to be ready before the train stopped, since it would start again in two minutes and proceed across the viaduct, out of the lands of Christendom, of which Combray, to me, represented the farthest limit. We would return by the Boulevard de la Gare, which contained the most attractive villas in the town. In each of their gardens the moonlight, copying the art of Hubert Robert, had scattered its broken staircases of white marble, its fountains of water and gates temptingly ajar. Its beams had swept away the telegraph office. All that was left of it was a column, half shattered, but preserving the beauty of a ruin which endures for all time. I would by now be dragging my weary limbs, and ready to drop with sleep; the balmy scent of the lime-trees seemed a consolation which I could obtain only at the price of great suffering and exhaustion, and not worthy of the effort. From gates far apart the watchdogs, awakened by our steps in the silence, would set up an antiphonal barking, as I still hear them bark, at times, in the evenings, and it is in their custody (when the public gardens of Combray were constructed on its site) that the Boulevard de la Gare must have taken refuge, for wherever I may be, as soon as they begin their alternate challenge and acceptance, I can see it again with all its lime-trees, and its pavement glistening beneath the moon.

Suddenly my father would bring us to a standstill and ask my mother—"Where are we?" Utterly worn out by the walk but still proud of her husband, she would lovingly confess that she had not the least idea. He would shrug his shoulders and laugh. And then, as though it had slipped, with his latchkey, from his waistcoat pocket, he would point out to us, where it stood before our eyes, the back-gate of our own garden, which had come, hand-in-hand with the familiar corner of the Rue du Saint-Esprit, to await us, to greet us at the end of our wanderings over paths unknown. My mother would murmur admiringly "You really are wonderful!" And from that instant I had not to take another step; the ground moved forward under my feet in that garden where, for so long, my actions had ceased to require any control, or even attention, from my will. Custom came to take me in her arms, carried me all the way up to my bed, and laid me down there like a little child.

Although Saturday, by beginning an hour earlier, and by depriving her of the services of Françoise, passed more slowly than other days for my aunt, yet, the moment it was past, and a new week begun, she would look forward with impatience to its return, as something that embodied all the novelty and distraction which her frail and disordered body was still able to endure. This was not to say, however, that she did not long, at times, for some even greater variation, that she did not pass through those abnormal hours in which one thirsts for something different from what one has, when those people who, through lack of energy or imagination, are unable to generate any motive power in themselves, cry out, as the clock strikes or the postman knocks, in their eagerness for news (even if it be bad news), for some emotion (even that of grief); when the heart-strings, which prosperity has silenced, like a harp laid by, yearn to be plucked and sounded again by some hand, even a brutal hand, even if it shall break them; when the will, which has with such difficulty brought itself to subdue its impulse, to renounce its right to abandon itself to its own uncontrolled desires, and consequent sufferings, would fain cast its guiding reins into the hands of circumstances, coercive and, it may be, cruel. Of course, since my aunt's strength, which was completely drained by the slightest exertion, returned but drop by drop into the pool of her repose, the reservoir was very slow in filling, and months would go by before she reached that surplus which other people use up in their daily activities, but which she had no idea—and could never decide how to employ. And I have no doubt that then—just as a desire to have her potatoes served with béchamel sauce, for a change, would be formed, ultimately, from the pleasure she found in the daily reappearance of those mashed potatoes of which she was never 'tired'—she would extract from the accumulation of those monotonous days (on which she so much depended) a keen expectation of some domestic cataclysm, instantaneous in its happening, but violent enough to compel her to put into effect, once for all, one of those changes which she knew would be beneficial to her health, but to which she could never make up her mind without some such stimulus. She was genuinely fond of us; she would have enjoyed the long luxury of weeping for our untimely decease; coming at a moment when she felt 'well' and was not in a perspiration, the news that the house was being destroyed by a fire, in which all the rest of us had already perished, a fire which, in a little while, would not leave one stone standing upon another, but from which she herself would still have plenty of time to escape without undue haste, provided that she rose at once from her bed, must often have haunted her dreams, as a prospect which combined with the two minor advantages of letting her taste the full savour of her affection for us in long years of mourning, and of causing universal stupefaction in the village when she should sally forth to conduct our obsequies, crushed but courageous, moribund but erect, the paramount and priceless boon of forcing her at the right moment, with no time to be lost, no room for weakening hesitations, to go off and spend the summer at her charming farm of Mirougrain, where there was a waterfall. Inasmuch as nothing of this sort had ever occurred, though indeed she must often have pondered the success of such a manœuvre as she lay alone absorbed in her interminable games of patience (and though it must have plunged her in despair from the first moment of its realisation, from the first of those little unforeseen facts, the first word of calamitous news, whose accents can never afterwards be expunged from the memory, everything that bears upon it the imprint of actual, physical death, so terribly different from the logical abstraction of its possibility) she would fall back from time to time, to add an interest to her life, upon imagining other, minor catastrophes, which she would follow up with passion. She would beguile herself with a sudden suspicion that Françoise had been robbing her, that she had set a trap to make certain, and had caught her betrayer red-handed; and being in the habit, when she made up a game of cards by herself, of playing her own and her adversary's hands at once, she would first stammer out Françoise's awkward apologies, and then reply to them with such a fiery indignation that any of us who happened to intrude upon her at one of these moments would find her bathed in perspiration, her eyes blazing, her false hair pushed awry and exposing the baldness of her brows. Françoise must often, from the next room, have heard these mordant sarcasms levelled at herself, the mere framing of which in words would not have relieved my aunt's feelings sufficiently, had they been allowed to remain in a purely immaterial form, without the degree of substance and reality which she added to them by murmuring them half-aloud. Sometimes, however, even these counterpane dramas would not satisfy my aunt; she must see her work staged. And so, on a Sunday, with all the doors mysteriously closed, she would confide in Eulalie her doubts of Françoise's integrity and her determination to be rid of her, and on another day she would confide in Françoise her suspicions of the disloyalty of Eulalie, to whom the front-door would very soon be closed for good. A few days more, and, disgusted with her latest confidant, she would again be 'as thick as thieves' with the traitor, while, before the next performance, the two would once more have changed their parts. But the suspicions which Eulalie might occasionally breed in her were no more than a fire of straw, which must soon subside for lack of fuel, since Eulalie was not living with her in the house. It was a very different matter when the suspect was Françoise, of whose presence under the same roof as herself my aunt was perpetually conscious, while for fear of catching cold, were she to leave her bed, she would never dare go downstairs to the kitchen to see for herself whether there was, indeed, any foundation for her suspicions. And so on by degrees, until her mind had no other occupation than to attempt, at every hour of the day, to discover what was being done, what was being concealed from her by Françoise. She would detect the most furtive movement of Françoise's features, something contradictory in what she was saying, some desire which she appeared to be screening. And she would shew her that she was unmasked, by a single word, which made Françoise turn pale, and which my aunt seemed to find a cruel satisfaction in driving into her unhappy servant's heart. And the very next Sunday a disclosure by Eulalie—like one of those discoveries which suddenly open up an unsuspected field for exploration to some new science which has hitherto followed only the beaten paths—proved to my aunt that her own worst suspicions fell a long way short of the appalling truth. "But Françoise ought to know that," said Eulalie, "now that you have given her a carriage."

"Now that I have given her a carriage!" gasped my aunt.

"Oh, but I didn't know; I only thought so; I saw her go by yesterday in her open coach, as proud as Artaban, on her way to Roussainville market. I supposed that it must be Mme. Octave who had given it to her."

So on by degrees, until Françoise and my aunt, the quarry and the hunter, could never cease from trying to forestall each other's devices. My mother was afraid lest Françoise should develop a genuine hatred of my aunt, who was doing everything in her power to annoy her. However that might be, Françoise had come, more and more, to pay an infinitely scrupulous attention to my aunt's least word and gesture. When she had to ask her for anything she would hesitate, first, for a long time, making up her mind how best to begin. And when she had uttered her request, she would watch my aunt covertly, trying to guess from the expression on her face what she thought of it, and how she would reply. And in this way —whereas an artist who had been reading memoirs of the seventeenth century, and wished to bring himself nearer to the great Louis, would consider that he was making progress in that direction when he constructed a pedigree that traced his own descent from some historic family, or when he engaged in correspondence with one of the reigning Sovereigns of Europe, and so would shut his eyes to the mistake he was making in seeking to establish a similarity by an exact and therefore lifeless copy of mere outward forms—a middle-aged lady in a small country town, by doing no more than yield whole-hearted obedience to her own irresistible eccentricities, and to a spirit of mischief engendered by the utter idleness of her existence, could see, without ever having given a thought to Louis XIV, the most trivial occupations of her daily life, her morning toilet, her luncheon, her afternoon nap, assume, by virtue of their despotic singularity, something of the interest that was to be found in what Saint-

Simon used to call the 'machinery' of life at Versailles; and was able, too, to persuade herself that her silence, a shade of good humour or of arrogance on her features, would provide Françoise with matter for a mental commentary as tense with passion and terror, as did the silence, the good humour or the arrogance of the King when a courtier, or even his greatest nobles, had presented a petition to him, at the turning of an avenue, at Versailles.

One Sunday, when my aunt had received simultaneous visits from the Curé and from Eulalie, and had been left alone, afterwards, to rest, the whole family went upstairs to bid her good night, and Mamma ventured to condole with her on the unlucky coincidence that always brought both visitors to her door at the same time.

"I hear that things went wrong again to-day, Léonie," she said kindly, "you have had all your friends here at once."

And my great-aunt interrupted with: "Too many good things . . ." for, since her daughter's illness, she felt herself in duty bound to revive her as far as possible by always drawing her attention to the brighter side of things. But my father had begun to speak.

"I should like to take advantage," he said, "of the whole family's being here together, to tell you a story, so as not to have to begin all over again to each of you separately. I am afraid we are in M. Legrandin's bad books; he would hardly say 'How d'ye do' to me this morning."

I did not wait to hear the end of my father's story, for I had been with him myself after mass when we had passed M. Legrandin; instead, I went downstairs to the kitchen to ask for the bill of fare for our dinner, which was of fresh interest to me daily, like the news in a paper, and excited me as might the programme of a coming festivity.

As M. Legrandin had passed close by us on our way from church, walking by the side of a lady, the owner of a country house in the neighbourhood, whom we knew only by sight, my father had saluted him in a manner at once friendly and reserved, without stopping in his walk; M. Legrandin had barely acknowledged the courtesy, and then with an air of surprise, as though he had not recognised us, and with that distant look characteristic of people who do not wish to be agreeable, and who from the suddenly receding depths of their eyes seem to have caught sight of you at the far end of an interminably straight road, and at so great a distance that they content themselves with directing towards you an almost imperceptible movement of the head, in proportion to your doll-like dimensions.

Now, the lady who was walking with Legrandin was a model of virtue, known and highly respected; there could be no question of his being out for amorous adventure, and annoyed at being detected; and my father asked himself how he could possibly have displeased our friend.

"I should be all the more sorry to feel that he was angry with us," he said, "because among all those people in their Sunday clothes there is something about him, with his little cut-away coat and his soft neckties, so little 'dressed-up,' so genuinely simple; an air of innocence, almost, which is really attractive."

But the vote of the family council was unanimous, that my father had imagined the whole thing, or that Legrandin, at the moment in question, had been preoccupied in thinking about something else. Anyhow, my father's fears were dissipated no later than the following evening. As we returned from a long walk we saw, near the Pont-Vieux, Legrandin himself, who, on account of the holidays, was spending a few days more in Combray. He came up to us with outstretched hand: "Do you know, master book-lover," he asked me, "this line of Paul Desjardins?

Now are the woods all black, but still the sky is blue.

Is not that a fine rendering of a moment like this? Perhaps you have never read Paul Desjardins. Read him, my boy, read him; in these days he is converted, they tell me, into a preaching friar, but he used to have the most charming water-colour touch—

Now are the woods all black, but still the sky is blue.

May you always see a blue sky overhead, my young friend; and then, even when the time comes, which is coming now for me, when the woods are all black, when night is fast falling, you will be able to console yourself, as I am doing, by looking up to the sky." He took a cigarette from his pocket and stood for a long time, his eyes fixed on the horizon. "Good-bye, friends!" he suddenly exclaimed, and left us.

At the hour when I usually went downstairs to find out what there was for dinner, its preparation would already have begun, and Françoise, a colonel with all the forces of nature for her subalterns, as in the fairy-tales where giants hire themselves out as scullions, would be stirring the coals, putting the potatoes to steam, and, at the right moment, finishing over the fire those culinary masterpieces which had been first got ready in some of the great array of vessels, triumphs of the potter's craft, which ranged from tubs and boilers and cauldrons and fish kettles down to jars for game, moulds for pastry, and tiny pannikins for cream, and included an entire collection of pots and pans of every shape and size. I would stop by the table, where the kitchen-maid had shelled them, to inspect the platoons of peas, drawn up in ranks and numbered, like little green marbles, ready for a game; but what fascinated me would be the asparagus, tinged with ultramarine and rosy pink which ran from their heads, finely stippled in mauve and azure, through a series of imperceptible changes to their white feet, still stained a little by the soil of their garden-bed: a rainbow-loveliness that was not of this world. I felt that these celestial hues indicated the presence of exquisite creatures who had been pleased to assume vegetable form, who, through the disguise which covered their firm and edible flesh, allowed me to discern in this radiance of earliest dawn, these hinted rainbows, these blue evening shades, that precious quality which I should recognise again when, all night long after a dinner at which I had partaken of them, they played (lyrical and coarse in their jesting as the fairies in Shakespeare's *Dream*) at transforming my humble chamber into a bower of aromatic perfume.

Poor Giotto's Charity, as Swann had named her, charged by Françoise with the task of preparing them for the table, would have them lying beside her in a basket; sitting with a mournful air, as though all the sorrows of the world were heaped upon her; and the light crowns of azure which capped the asparagus shoots above their pink jackets would be finely and separately outlined, star by star, as in Giotto's fresco are the flowers banded about the brows, or patterning the basket of his Virtue at Padua. And, meanwhile, Françoise would be turning on the spit one of those chickens, such as she alone knew how to roast, chickens which had wafted far abroad from Combray the sweet savour of her merits, and which, while she was serving them to us at table, would make the quality of kindness predominate for the moment in my private conception of her character; the aroma of that cooked flesh, which she knew how to make so unctuous and so tender, seeming to me no more than the proper perfume of one of her many virtues.

But the day on which, while my father took counsel with his family upon our strange meeting with Legrandin, I went down to the kitchen, was one of those days when Giotto's Charity, still very weak and ill after her recent confinement, had been unable to rise from her bed; Françoise, being without assistance, had fallen into arrears. When I went in, I saw her in the back-kitchen which opened on to the courtyard, in process of killing a chicken; by its desperate and quite natural resistance, which Françoise, beside herself with rage as she attempted to slit its throat beneath the ear, accompanied with shrill cries of "Filthy creature! Filthy creature!" it made the saintly kindness and unction of our servant rather less prominent than it would do, next day at dinner, when it made its appearance in a skin gold-embroidered like a chasuble, and its precious juice was poured out drop by drop as from a pyx. When it was dead Françoise mopped up its streaming blood, in which, however, she did not let her rancour drown, for she gave vent to another burst of rage, and, gazing down at the carcass of her enemy, uttered a final "Filthy creature!"

I crept out of the kitchen and upstairs, trembling all over; I could have prayed, then, for the instant dismissal of Françoise. But who would have baked me such hot rolls, boiled me such fragrant coffee, and even—roasted me such chickens? And, as it happened, everyone else had already had to make the same cowardly reckoning. For my aunt Léonie knew (though I was still in ignorance of this) that Françoise, who, for her own daughter or for her nephews, would have given her life without a murmur, shewed a singular implacability in her dealings with the rest of the world. In spite of which my aunt still retained her, for, while conscious of her cruelty, she could appreciate her services. I began gradually to realise that Françoise's kindness, her compunction, the sum total of her virtues concealed many of these back-kitchen tragedies, just as history reveals to us that the reigns of the kings and queens who are portrayed as kneeling with clasped hands in the windows of churches, were stained by oppression and bloodshed. I had taken note of the fact that, apart from her own kinsfolk, the sufferings of humanity inspired in her a pity which increased in direct ratio to the distance separating the sufferers from herself. The tears which flowed from her in torrents when she read of the misfortunes of persons unknown to her, in a newspaper, were quickly stemmed once she had been able to form a more accurate mental picture of the victims. One night, shortly after her confinement, the kitchen-maid was seized with the most appalling pains; Mamma heard her groans, and rose and awakened Françoise, who, quite unmoved, declared that all the outcry was mere malingering, that the girl wanted to 'play the mistress' in the house. The doctor, who had been afraid of some such attack, had left a marker in a medical dictionary which we had, at the page on which the symptoms were described, and had told us to turn up this passage, where we would find the measures of 'first aid' to be adopted. My mother sent Françoise to fetch the book, warning her not to let the marker drop out. An hour elapsed, and Françoise had not returned; my mother, supposing that she had gone back to bed, grew vexed, and told me to go myself to the bookcase and fetch the volume. I did so, and there found Françoise who, in her curiosity to know what the marker indicated, had begun to read the clinical account of these after-pains, and was violently sobbing, now that it was a question of a type of illness with which she was not familiar. At each painful symptom mentioned by the writer she would exclaim: "Oh, oh, Holy Virgin, is it possible that God wishes any wretched human creature to suffer so? Oh, the poor girl!"

But when I had called her, and she had returned to the bedside of Giotto's Charity, her tears at once ceased to flow; she could find no stimulus for that pleasant sensation of tenderness and pity which she very well knew, having been moved to it often enough by the perusal of newspapers; nor any other pleasure of the same kind in her sense of weariness and irritation at being pulled out of bed in the middle of the night for the kitchen-maid; so that at the sight of those very sufferings, the printed account of which had moved her to tears, she had nothing to offer but ill-tempered mutterings, mingled with bitter sarcasm, saying, when she thought that we had gone out of earshot: "Well, she need never have done what she must have done to bring all this about! She found that pleasant enough, I dare say! She had better not put on any airs now. All the same, he must have been a god-forsaken young man to go after *that*. Dear, dear, it's just as they used to say in my poor mother's country:

Snaps and snails and puppy-dogs' tails,
  And dirty sluts in plenty,
Smell sweeter than roses in young men's noses
  When the heart is one-and-twenty."

Although, when her grandson had a slight cold in his head, she would set off at night, even if she were ill also, instead of going to bed, to see whether he had everything that he wanted, covering ten miles on foot before daybreak so as to be in time to begin her work, this same love for her own people, and her desire to establish the future greatness of her house on a solid foundation reacted, in her policy with regard to the other servants, in one unvarying maxim, which was never to let any of them set foot in my aunt's room; indeed she shewed a sort of pride in not allowing anyone else to come near my aunt, preferring, when she herself was ill, to get out of bed and to administer the Vichy water in person, rather than to concede to the kitchen-maid the right of entry into her mistress's presence. There is a species of hymenoptera, observed by Fabre, the burrowing wasp, which in order to provide a supply of fresh meat for her offspring after her own decease, calls in the science of anatomy to amplify the resources of her instinctive cruelty, and, having made a collection of weevils and spiders, proceeds with marvellous knowledge and skill to pierce the nerve-centre on which their power of locomotion (but none of their other vital functions) depends, so that the paralysed insect, beside which her egg is laid, will furnish the larva, when it is hatched, with a tamed and inoffensive quarry, incapable either of flight or of resistance, but perfectly fresh for the larder: in the same way Françoise had adopted, to minister to her permanent and unfaltering resolution to render the house uninhabitable to any other servant, a series of crafty and pitiless stratagems. Many years later we discovered that, if we had been fed on asparagus day after day throughout that whole season, it was because the smell of the plants gave the poor kitchen-maid, who had to prepare them, such violent attacks of asthma that she was finally obliged to leave my aunt's service.

Alas! we had definitely to alter our opinion of M. Legrandin. On one of the Sundays following our meeting with him on the Pont-Vieux, after which my father had been forced to confess himself mistaken, as mass drew to an end, and, with the sunshine and the noise of the outer world, something else invaded the church, an atmosphere so far from sacred that Mme. Goupil, Mme. Percepied (all those, in fact, who a moment ago, when I arrived a little late, had been sitting motionless, their eyes fixed on their prayer-books; who, I might even have thought, had not seen me come in, had not their feet moved slightly to push away the little kneeling-desk which was preventing me from getting to my chair) began in loud voices to discuss with us all manner of utterly mundane topics, as though we were already outside in the Square, we saw, standing on the sun-baked steps of the porch, dominating the many-coloured tumult of the market, Legrandin himself, whom the husband of the lady we had seen with him, on the previous occasion, was just going to introduce to the wife of another large landed proprietor of the district. Legrandin's face shewed an extraordinary zeal and animation; he made a profound bow, with a subsidiary backward movement which brought his spine sharply up into a position behind its starting-point, a gesture in which he must have been trained by the husband of his sister, Mme. de Cambremer. This rapid recovery caused a sort of tense muscular wave to ripple over Legrandin's hips, which I had not supposed to be so fleshy; I cannot say why, but this undulation of pure matter, this wholly carnal fluency, with not the least hint in it of spiritual significance, this wave lashed to a fury by the wind of an assiduity, an obsequiousness of the basest sort, awoke my mind suddenly to the possibility of a Legrandin altogether different from the one whom we knew. The lady gave him some message for her coachman, and while he was stepping down to her carriage the impression of joy, timid and devout, which the introduction had stamped there, still lingered on his face. Carried away in a sort of dream, he smiled, then he began to hurry back towards the lady; he was walking faster than usual, and his shoulders swayed backwards and forwards, right and left, in the most absurd fashion; altogether he looked, so utterly had he abandoned himself to it, ignoring all other considerations, as though he were the lifeless and wire-pulled puppet of his own happiness. Meanwhile we were coming out through the porch; we were passing close beside him; he was too well bred to turn his head away; but he fixed his eyes, which had suddenly changed to those of a seer, lost in the profundity of his vision, on so distant a point of the horizon that he could not see us, and so had not to acknowledge our presence. His face emerged, still with an air of innocence, from his straight and pliant coat, which looked as though conscious of having been led astray, in spite of itself, and plunged into surroundings of a detested splendour. And a spotted necktie, stirred by the breezes of the Square, continued to float in front of Legrandin, like the standard of his proud isolation, of his noble independence. Just as we reached the house my mother discovered that we had forgotten the 'Saint-Honoré,' and asked my father to go back with me and tell them to send it up at once. Near the church we met Legrandin, coming towards us with the same lady, whom he was escorting to her carriage. He brushed past us, and did not interrupt what he was saying to her, but gave us, out of the corner of his blue eye, a little sign, which began and ended, so to speak, inside his eyelids, and as it did not involve the least movement of his facial muscles, managed to pass quite unperceived by the lady; but, striving to compensate by the intensity of his feelings for the somewhat restricted field in which they had to find expression, he made that blue chink, which was set apart for us, sparkle with all the animation of cordiality, which went far beyond mere playfulness, and almost touched the border-line of roguery; he subtilised the refinements of good-fellowship into a wink of connivance, a hint, a hidden meaning, a secret understanding, all the mysteries of complicity in a plot, and finally exalted his assurances of friendship to the level of protestations of affection, even of a declaration of love, lighting up for us, and for us alone, with a secret and languid flame invisible by the great lady upon his other side, an enamoured pupil in a countenance of ice.

Only the day before he had asked my parents to send me to dine with him on this same Sunday evening. "Come and bear your aged friend company," he had said to me. "Like the nosegay which a traveller sends us from some land to which we shall never go again, come and let me breathe from the far country of your adolescence the scent of those flowers of spring among which I also used to wander, many years ago. Come with the primrose, with the canon's beard, with the gold-cup; come with the stone-crop, whereof are posies made, pledges of love, in the Balzacian flora, come with that flower of the Resurrection morning, the Easter daisy, come with the snowballs of the guelder-rose, which begin to embalm with their fragrance the alleys of your great-aunt's garden ere the last snows of Lent are melted from its soil. Come with the glorious silken raiment of the lily, apparel fit for Solomon, and with the many-coloured enamel of the pansies, but come, above all, with the spring breeze, still cooled by the last frosts of winter, wafting apart, for the two butterflies' sake, that have waited outside all morning, the closed portals of the first Jerusalem rose."

The question was raised at home whether, all things considered, I ought still to be sent to dine with M. Legrandin. But my grandmother refused to believe that he could have been impolite.

"You admit yourself that he appears at church there, quite simply dressed, and all that; he hardly looks like a man of fashion." She added that, in any event, even if, at the worst, he had been intentionally rude, it was far better for us to pretend that we had noticed nothing. And indeed my father himself, though more annoyed than any of us by the attitude which Legrandin had adopted, may still have held in reserve a final uncertainty as to its true meaning. It was like every attitude or action which reveals a man's deep and hidden character; they bear no relation to what he has previously said, and we cannot confirm our suspicions by the culprit's evidence, for he will admit nothing; we are reduced to the evidence of our own senses, and we ask ourselves, in the face of this detached and incoherent fragment of recollection, whether indeed our senses have not been the victims of a hallucination; with the result that such attitudes, and these alone are of importance in indicating character, are the most apt to leave us in perplexity.

I dined with Legrandin on the terrace of his house, by moonlight. "There is a charming quality, is there not," he said to me, "in this silence; for hearts that are wounded, as mine is, a novelist, whom you will read in time to come, claims that there is no remedy but silence and shadow. And see you this, my boy, there comes in all lives a time, towards which you still have far to go, when the weary eyes can endure but one kind of light, the light which a fine evening like this prepares for us in the stillroom of darkness, when the ears can listen to no music save what the moonlight breathes through the flute of silence."

I could hear what M. Legrandin was saying; like everything that he said, it sounded attractive; but I was disturbed by the memory of a lady whom I had seen recently for the first time; and thinking, now that I knew that Legrandin was on friendly terms with several of the local aristocracy, that perhaps she also was among his acquaintance, I summoned up all my courage and said to him: "Tell me, sir, do you, by any chance, know the lady—the ladies of Guermantes?" and I felt glad because, in pronouncing the name, I had secured a sort of power over it, by the mere act of drawing it up out of my dreams and giving it an objective existence in the world of spoken things.

But, at the sound of the word Guermantes, I saw in the middle of each of our friend's blue eyes a little brown dimple appear, as though they had been stabbed by some invisible pin-point, while the rest of his pupils, reacting from the shock, received and secreted the azure overflow. His fringed eyelids darkened, and drooped. His mouth, which had been stiffened and seared with bitter lines, was the first to recover, and smiled, while his eyes still seemed full of pain, like the eyes of a good-looking martyr whose body bristles with arrows.

"No, I do not know them," he said, but instead of uttering so simple a piece of information, a reply in which there was so little that could astonish me, in the natural and conversational tone which would have befitted it, he recited it with a separate stress upon each word, leaning forward, bowing his head, with at once the vehemence which a man gives, so as to be believed, to a highly improbable statement (as though the fact that he did not know the Guermantes could be due only to some strange accident of fortune) and with the emphasis of a man who, finding himself unable to keep silence about what is to him a painful situation, chooses to proclaim it aloud, so as to convince his hearers that the confession he is making is one that causes him no embarrassment, but is easy, agreeable, spontaneous, that the situation in question, in this case the absence of relations with the Guermantes family, might very well have been not forced upon, but actually designed by Legrandin himself, might arise from some family tradition, some moral principle or mystical vow which expressly forbade his seeking their society.

"No," he resumed, explaining by his words the tone in which they were uttered. "No, I do not know them; I have never wished to know them; I have always made a point of preserving complete independence; at heart, as you know, I am a bit of a Radical. People are always coming to me about it, telling me I am mistaken in not going to Guermantes, that I make myself seem ill-bred, uncivilised, an old bear. But that's not the sort of reputation that can frighten me; it's too true! In my heart of hearts I care for nothing in the world now but a few churches, books—two or three, pictures—rather more, perhaps, and the light of the moon when the fresh breeze of youth (such as yours) wafts to my nostrils the scent of gardens whose flowers my old eyes are not sharp enough, now, to distinguish."

I did not understand very clearly why, in order to refrain from going to the houses of people whom one did not know, it should be necessary to cling to one's independence, nor how that could give one the appearance of a savage or a bear. But what I did understand was this, that Legrandin was not altogether truthful when he said that he cared only for churches, moonlight, and youth; he cared also, he cared a very great deal, for people who lived in country houses, and would be so much afraid, when in their company, of incurring their displeasure that he would never dare to let them see that he numbered, as well, among his friends middle-class people, the families of solicitors and stockbrokers, preferring, if the truth must be known, that it should be revealed in his absence, when he was out of earshot, that judgment should go against him (if so it must) by default: in a word, he was a snob. Of course he would never have admitted all or any of this in the poetical language which my family and I so much admired. And if I asked him, "Do you know the Guermantes family?" Legrandin the talker would reply, "No, I have never cared to know them." But unfortunately the talker was now subordinated to another Legrandin, whom he kept carefully hidden in his breast, whom he would never consciously exhibit, because this other could tell stories about our own Legrandin and about his snobbishness which would have ruined his reputation for ever; and this other Legrandin had replied to me already in that wounded look, that stiffened smile, the undue gravity of his tone in uttering those few words, in the thousand arrows by which our own Legrandin had instantaneously been stabbed and sickened, like a Saint Sebastian of snobbery:

"Oh, how you hurt me! No, I do not know the Guermantes family. Do not remind me of the great sorrow of my life." And since this other, this irrepressible, dominant, despotic Legrandin, if he lacked our Legrandin's charming vocabulary, shewed an infinitely greater promptness in expressing himself, by means of what are called 'reflexes,' it followed that, when Legrandin the talker attempted to silence him, he would already have spoken, and it would be useless for our friend to deplore the bad impression which the revelations of his *alter ego* must have caused, since he could do no more now than endeavour to mitigate them.

This was not to say that M. Legrandin was anything but sincere when he inveighed against snobs. He could not (from his own knowledge, at least) be aware that he was one also, since it is only with the passions of others that we are ever really familiar, and what we come to find out about our own can be no more than what other people have shewn us. Upon ourselves they react but indirectly, through our imagination, which substitutes for our actual, primary motives other, secondary motives, less stark and therefore more decent. Never had Legrandin's snobbishness impelled him to make a habit of visiting a duchess as such. Instead, it would set his imagination to make that duchess appear, in Legrandin's eyes, endowed with all the graces. He would be drawn towards the duchess, assuring himself the while that he was yielding to the attractions of her mind, and her other virtues, which the vile race of snobs could never understand. Only his fellow-snobs knew that he was of their number, for, owing to their inability to appreciate the intervening efforts of his imagination, they saw in close juxtaposition the social activities of Legrandin and their primary cause.

At home, meanwhile, we had no longer any illusions as to M. Legrandin, and our relations with him had become much more distant. Mamma would be greatly delighted whenever she caught him red-handed in the sin, which he continued to call the unpardonable sin, of snobbery. As for my father, he found it difficult to take Legrandin's airs in so light, in so detached a spirit; and when there was some talk, one year, of sending me to spend the long summer holidays at Balbec with my grandmother, he said: "I must, most certainly, tell Legrandin that you are going to Balbec, to see whether he will offer you an introduction to his sister. He probably doesn't remember telling us that she lived within a mile of the place."

My grandmother, who held that, when one went to the seaside, one ought to be on the beach from morning to night, to taste the salt breezes, and that one should not know anyone in the place, because calls and parties and excursions were so much time stolen from what belonged, by rights, to the sea-air, begged him on no account to speak to Legrandin of our plans; for already, in her mind's eye, she could see his sister, Mme. de Cambremer, alighting from her carriage at the door of our hotel just as we were on the point of going out fishing, and obliging us to remain indoors all afternoon to entertain her. But Mamma laughed her fears to scorn, for she herself felt that the danger was not so threatening, and that Legrandin would shew no undue anxiety to make us acquainted with his sister. And, as it happened, there was no need for any of us to introduce the subject of Balbec, for it was Legrandin himself who, without the least suspicion that we had ever had any intention of visiting those parts, walked into the trap uninvited one evening, when we met him strolling on the banks of the Vivonne.

"There are tints in the clouds this evening, violets and blues, which are very beautiful, are they not, my friend?" he said to my father. "Especially a blue which is far more floral than atmospheric, a cineraria blue, which it is surprising to see in the sky. And that little pink cloud there, has it not just the tint of some flower, a carnation or hydrangea? Nowhere, perhaps, except on the shores of the English Channel, where Normandy merges into Brittany, have I been able to find such copious examples of what you might call a vegetable kingdom in the clouds. Down there, close to Balbec, among all those places which are still so uncivilised, there is a little bay, charmingly quiet, where the sunsets of the Auge Valley, those red-and-gold sunsets (which, all the same, I am very far from despising) seem commonplace and insignificant; for in that moist and gentle atmosphere these heavenly flower-beds will break into blossom, in a few moments, in the evenings, incomparably lovely, and often lasting for hours before they fade. Others shed their leaves at once, and then it is more beautiful still to see the sky strewn with the scattering of their innumerable petals, sulphurous yellow and rosy red. In that bay, which they call the Opal Bay, the golden sands appear more charming still from being fastened, like fair Andromeda, to those terrible rocks of the surrounding coast, to that funereal shore, famed for the number of its wrecks, where every winter many a brave vessel falls a victim to the perils of the sea. Balbec! the oldest bone in the geological skeleton that underlies our soil, the true Ar-mor, the sea, the land's end, the accursed region which Anatole France—an enchanter whose works our young friend ought to read—has so well depicted, beneath its eternal fogs, as though it were indeed the land of the Cimmerians in the Odyssey. Balbec; yes, they are building hotels there now, superimposing them upon its ancient and charming soil, which they are powerless to alter; how delightful it is, down there, to be able to step out at once into regions so primitive and so entrancing."

"Indeed! And do you know anyone at Balbec?" inquired my father. "This young man is just going to spend a couple of months there with his grandmother, and my wife too, perhaps."

Legrandin, taken unawares by the question at a moment when he was looking directly at my father, was unable to turn aside his gaze, and so concentrated it with steadily increasing intensity—smiling mournfully the while—upon the eyes of his questioner, with an air of friendliness and frankness and of not being afraid to look him in the face, until he seemed to have penetrated my father's skull, as it had been a ball of glass, and to be seeing, at the moment, a long way beyond and behind it, a brightly coloured cloud, which provided him with a mental alibi, and would enable him to establish the theory that, just when he was being asked whether he knew anyone at Balbec, he had been thinking of something else, and so had not heard the question. As a rule these tactics make the questioner proceed to ask, "Why, what are you thinking about?" But my father, inquisitive, annoyed, and cruel, repeated: "Have you friends, then, in that neighbourhood, that you know Balbec so well?"

In a final and desperate effort the smiling gaze of Legrandin struggled to the extreme limits of its tenderness, vagueness, candour, and distraction; then feeling, no doubt, that there was nothing left for it now but to answer, he said to us: "I have friends all the world over, wherever there are companies of trees, stricken but not defeated, which have come together to offer a common supplication, with pathetic obstinacy, to an inclement sky which has no mercy upon them."

"That is not quite what I meant," interrupted my father, obstinate as a tree and merciless as the sky. "I asked you, in case anything should happen to my mother-in-law and she wanted to feel that she was not all alone down there, at the ends of the earth, whether you knew any of the people."

"There as elsewhere, I know everyone and I know no one," replied Legrandin, who was by no means ready yet to surrender; "places I know well, people very slightly. But, down there, the places themselves seem to me just like people, rare and wonderful people, of a delicate quality which would have been corrupted and ruined by the gift of life. Perhaps it is a castle which you encounter upon the cliff's edge; standing there by the roadside, where it has halted to contemplate its sorrows before an evening sky, still rosy, through which a golden moon is climbing; while the fishing-boats, homeward bound, creasing the watered silk of the Channel, hoist its pennant at their mastheads and carry its colours. Or perhaps it is a simple dwelling-house that stands alone, ugly, if anything, timid-seeming but full of romance, hiding from every eye some imperishable secret of happiness and disenchantment. That land which knows not truth," he continued with Machiavellian subtlety, "that land of infinite fiction makes bad reading for any boy; and is certainly not what I should choose or recommend for my young friend here, who is already so much inclined to melancholy, for a heart already predisposed to receive its impressions. Climates that breathe amorous secrets and futile regrets may agree with an old and disillusioned man like myself; but they must always prove fatal to a temperament which is still unformed. Believe me," he went on with emphasis, "the waters of that bay—more Breton than Norman—may exert a sedative influence, though even that is of questionable value, upon a heart which, like mine, is no longer unbroken, a heart for whose wounds there is no longer anything to compensate. But at your age, my boy, those waters are contra-indicated. . . . Good night to you, neighbours," he added, moving away from us with that evasive abruptness to which we were accustomed; and then, turning towards us, with a physicianly finger raised in warning, he resumed the consultation: "No Balbec before you are fifty!" he called out to me, "and even then it must depend on the state of the heart."

My father spoke to him of it again, as often as we met him, and tortured him with questions, but it was labour in vain: like that scholarly swindler who devoted to the fabrication of forged palimpsests a wealth of skill and knowledge and industry the hundredth part of which would have sufficed to establish him in a more lucrative—but an honourable occupation, M. Legrandin, had we insisted further, would in the end have constructed a whole system of ethics, and a celestial geography of Lower Normandy, sooner than admit to us that, within a mile of Balbec, his own sister was living in her own house; sooner than find himself obliged to offer us a letter of introduction, the prospect of which would never have inspired him with such terror had he been absolutely certain—as, from his knowledge of my grandmother's character, he really ought to have been certain—that in no circumstances whatsoever would we have dreamed of making use of it.

⁂

We used always to return from our walks in good time to pay aunt Léonie a visit before dinner. In the first weeks of our Combray holidays, when the days ended early, we would still be able to see, as we turned into the Rue du Saint-Esprit, a reflection of the western sky from the windows of the house and a band of purple at the foot of the Calvary, which was mirrored further on in the pond; a fiery glow which, accompanied often by a cold that burned and stung, would associate itself in my mind with the glow of the fire over which, at that very moment, was roasting the chicken that was to furnish me, in place of the poetic pleasure I had found in my walk, with the sensual pleasures of good feeding, warmth and rest. But in summer, when we came back to the house, the sun would not have set; and while we were upstairs paying our visit to aunt Léonie its rays, sinking until they touched and lay along her window-sill, would there be caught and held by the large inner curtains and the bands which tied them back to the wall, and split and scattered and filtered; and then, at last, would fall upon and inlay with tiny flakes of gold the lemonwood of her chest-of-drawers, illuminating the room in their passage with the same delicate, slanting, shadowed beams that fall among the boles of forest trees. But on some days, though very rarely, the chest-of-drawers would long since have shed its momentary adornments, there would no longer, as we turned into the Rue du Saint-Esprit, be any reflection from the western sky burning along the line of window-panes; the pond beneath the Calvary would have lost its fiery glow, sometimes indeed had changed already to an opalescent pallor, while a long ribbon of moonlight, bent and broken and broadened by every ripple upon the water's surface, would be lying across it, from end to end. Then, as we drew near the house, we would make out a figure standing upon the doorstep, and Mamma would say to me: "Good heavens! There is Françoise looking out for us; your aunt must be anxious; that means we are late."

And without wasting time by stopping to take off our 'things' we would fly upstairs to my aunt Léonie's room to reassure her, to prove to her by our bodily presence that all her gloomy imaginings were false, that, on the contrary, nothing had happened to us, but that we had gone the 'Guermantes way,' and, good lord, when one took that walk, my aunt knew well enough that one could never say at what time one would be home.

"There, Françoise," my aunt would say, "didn't I tell you that they must have gone the Guermantes way? Good gracious! They must be hungry! And your nice leg of mutton will be quite dried up now, after all the hours it's been waiting. What a time to come in! Well, and so you went the Guermantes way?"

"But, Léonie, I supposed you knew," Mamma would answer. "I thought that Françoise had seen us go out by the little gate, through the kitchen-garden."

For there were, in the environs of Combray, two 'ways' which we used to take for our walks, and so diametrically opposed that we would actually leave the house by a different door, according to the way we had chosen: the way towards Méséglise-la-Vineuse, which we called also 'Swann's way,' because, to get there, one had to pass along the boundary of M. Swann's estate, and the 'Guermantes way.' Of Méséglise-la-Vineuse, to tell the truth, I never knew anything more than the way there, and the strange people who would come over on Sundays to take the air in Combray, people whom, this time, neither my aunt nor any of us would 'know at all,' and whom we would therefore assume to be 'people who must have come over from Méséglise.' As for Guermantes, I was to know it well enough one day, but that day had still to come; and, during the whole of my boyhood, if Méséglise was to me something as inaccessible as the horizon, which remained hidden from sight, however far one went, by the folds of a country which no longer bore the least resemblance to the country round Combray; Guermantes, on the other hand, meant no more than the ultimate goal, ideal rather than real, of the 'Guermantes way,' a sort of abstract geographical term like the North Pole or the Equator. And so to 'take the Guermantes way' in order to get to Méséglise, or *vice versa,* would have seemed to me as nonsensical a proceeding as to turn to the east in order to reach the west. Since my father used always to speak of the 'Méséglise way' as comprising the finest view of a plain that he knew anywhere, and of the 'Guermantes way' as typical of river scenery, I had invested each of them, by conceiving them in this way as two distinct entities, with that cohesion, that unity which belongs only to the figments of the mind; the smallest detail of either of them appeared to me as a precious thing, which exhibited the special excellence of the whole, while, immediately beside them, in the first stages of our walk, before we had reached the sacred soil of one or the other, the purely material roads, at definite points on which they were set down as the ideal view over a plain and the ideal scenery of a river, were no more worth the trouble of looking at them than, to a keen playgoer and lover of dramatic art, are the little streets which may happen to run past the walls of a theatre. But, above all, I set between them, far more distinctly than the mere distance in miles and yards and inches which separated one from the other, the distance that there was between the two parts of my brain in which I used to think of them, one of those distances of the mind which time serves only to lengthen, which separate things irremediably from one another, keeping them for ever upon different planes. And this distinction was rendered still more absolute because the habit we had of never going both ways on the same day, or in the course of the same walk, but the 'Méséglise way' one time and the 'Guermantes way' another, shut them up, so to speak, far apart and unaware of each other's existence, in the sealed vessels—between which there could be no communication—of separate afternoons.

When we had decided to go the 'Méséglise way' we would start (without undue haste, and even if the sky were clouded over, since the walk was not very long, and did not take us too far from home), as though we were not going anywhere in particular, by the front-door of my aunt's house, which opened on to the Rue du Saint-Esprit. We would be greeted by the gunsmith, we would drop our letters into the box, we would tell Théodore, from Françoise, as we passed, that she had run out of oil or coffee, and we would leave the town by the road which ran along the white fence of M. Swann's park. Before reaching it we would be met on our way by the scent of his lilac-trees, come out to welcome strangers. Out of the fresh little green hearts of their foliage the lilacs raised inquisitively over the fence of the park their plumes of white or purple blossom, which glowed, even in the shade, with the sunlight in which they had been bathed. Some of them, half-concealed by the little tiled house, called the Archers' Lodge, in which Swann's keeper lived, overtopped its gothic gable with their rosy minaret. The nymphs of spring would have seemed coarse and vulgar in comparison with these young houris, who retained, in this French garden, the pure and vivid colouring of a Persian miniature. Despite my desire to throw my arms about their pliant forms and to draw down towards me the starry locks that crowned their fragrant heads, we would pass them by without stopping, for my parents had ceased to visit Tansonville since Swann's marriage, and, so as not to appear to be looking into his park, we would, instead of taking the road which ran beside its boundary and then climbed straight up to the open fields, choose another way, which led in the same direction, but circuitously, and brought us out rather too far from home.

One day my grandfather said to my father: "Don't you remember Swann's telling us yesterday that his wife and daughter had gone off to Rheims and that he was taking the opportunity of spending a day or two in Paris? We might go along by the park, since the ladies are not at home; that will make it a little shorter."

We stopped for a moment by the fence. Lilac-time was nearly over; some of the trees still thrust aloft, in tall purple chandeliers, their tiny balls of blossom, but in many places among their foliage where, only a week before, they had still been breaking in waves of fragrant foam, these were now spent and shrivelled and discoloured, a hollow scum, dry and scentless. My grandfather pointed out to my father in what respects the appearance of the place was still the same, and how far it had altered since the walk that he had taken with old M. Swann, on the day of his wife's death; and he seized the opportunity to tell us, once again, the story of that walk.

In front of us a path bordered with nasturtiums rose in the full glare of the sun towards the house. But to our right the park stretched away into the distance, on level ground. Overshadowed by the tall trees which stood close around it, an 'ornamental water' had been constructed by Swann's parents but, even in his most artificial creations, nature is the material upon which man has to work; certain spots will persist in remaining surrounded by the vassals of their own especial sovereignty, and will raise their immemorial standards among all the 'laid-out' scenery of a park, just as they would have done far from any human interference, in a solitude which must everywhere return to engulf them, springing up out of the necessities of their exposed position, and superimposing itself upon the work of man's hands. And so it was that, at the foot of the path which led down to this artificial lake, there might be seen, in its two tiers woven of trailing forget-me-nots below and of periwinkle flowers above, the natural, delicate, blue garland which binds the luminous, shadowed brows of water-nymphs; while the iris, its swords sweeping every way in regal profusion, stretched out over agrimony and water-growing king-cups the lilied sceptres, tattered glories of yellow and purple, of the kingdom of the lake.

The absence of Mlle. Swann, which—since it preserved me from the terrible risk of seeing her appear on one of the paths, and of being identified and scorned by this so privileged little girl who had Bergotte for a friend and used to go with him to visit cathedrals—made the exploration of Tansonville, now for the first time permitted me, a matter of indifference to myself, seemed however to invest the property, in my grandfather's and father's eyes, with a fresh and transient charm, and (like an entirely cloudless sky when one is going mountaineering) to make the day extraordinarily propitious for a walk in this direction; I should have liked to see their reckoning proved false, to see, by a miracle, Mlle. Swann appear, with her father, so close to us that we should not have time to escape, and should therefore be obliged to make her acquaintance. And so, when I suddenly noticed a straw basket lying forgotten on the grass by the side of a line whose float was bobbing in the water, I made a great effort to keep my father and grandfather looking in another direction, away from this sign that she might, after all, be in residence. Still, as Swann had told us that he ought not, really, to go away just then, as he had some people staying in the house, the line might equally belong to one of these guests. Not a footstep was to be heard on any of the paths. Somewhere in one of the tall trees, making a stage in its height, an invisible bird, desperately attempting to make the day seem shorter, was exploring with a long, continuous note the solitude that pressed it on every side, but it received at once so unanimous an answer, so powerful a repercussion of silence and of immobility that, one would have said, it had arrested for all eternity the moment which it had been trying to make pass more quickly. The sunlight fell so implacably from a fixed sky that one was naturally inclined to slip away out of the reach of its attentions, and even the slumbering water, whose repose was perpetually being invaded by the insects that swarmed above its surface, while it dreamed, no doubt, of some imaginary maelstrom, intensified the uneasiness which the sight of that floating cork had wrought in me, by appearing to draw it at full speed across the silent reaches of a mirrored firmament; now almost vertical, it seemed on the point of plunging down out of sight, and I had begun to ask myself whether, setting aside the longing and the terror that I had of making her acquaintance, it was not actually my duty to warn Mlle. Swann that the fish was biting—when I was obliged to run after my father and grandfather, who were calling me, and were surprised that I had not followed them along the little path, climbing up hill towards the open fields, into which they had already turned. I found the whole path throbbing with the fragrance of hawthorn-blossom. The hedge resembled a series of chapels, whose walls were no longer visible under the mountains of flowers that were heaped upon their altars; while underneath, the sun cast a square of light upon the ground, as though it had shone in upon them through a window; the scent that swept out over me from them was as rich, and as circumscribed in its range, as though I had been standing before the Lady-altar, and the flowers, themselves adorned also, held out each its little bunch of glittering stamens with an air of inattention, fine, radiating 'nerves' in the flamboyant style of architecture, like those which, in church, framed the stair to the rood-loft or closed the perpendicular tracery of the windows, but here spread out into pools of fleshy white, like strawberry-beds in spring. How simple and rustic, in comparison with these, would seem the dog-roses which, in a few weeks' time, would be climbing the same hillside path in the heat of the sun, dressed in the smooth silk of their blushing pink bodices, which would be undone and scattered by the first breath of wind.

But it was in vain that I lingered before the hawthorns, to breathe in, to marshall before my mind (which knew not what to make of it), to lose in order to rediscover their invisible and unchanging odour, to absorb myself in the rhythm which disposed their flowers here and there with the lightheartedness of youth, and at intervals as unexpected as certain intervals of music; they offered me an indefinite continuation of the same charm, in an inexhaustible profusion, but without letting me delve into it any more deeply, like those melodies which one can play over a hundred times in succession without coming any nearer to their secret. I turned away from them for a moment so as to be able to return to them with renewed strength. My eyes followed up the slope which, outside the hedge, rose steeply to the fields, a poppy that had strayed and been lost by its fellows, or a few cornflowers that had fallen lazily behind, and decorated the ground here and there with their flowers like the border of a tapestry, in which may be seen at intervals hints of the rustic theme which appears triumphant in the panel itself; infrequent still, spaced apart as the scattered houses which warn us that we are approaching a village, they betokened to me the vast expanse of waving corn beneath the fleecy clouds, and the sight of a single poppy hoisting upon its slender rigging and holding against the breeze its scarlet ensign, over the buoy of rich black earth from which it sprang, made my heart beat as does a wayfarer's when he perceives, upon some low-lying ground, an old and broken boat which is being caulked and made seaworthy, and cries out, although he has not yet caught sight of it, "The Sea!"

And then I returned to my hawthorns, and stood before them as one stands before those masterpieces of painting which, one imagines, one will be better able to 'take in' when one has looked away, for a moment, at something else; but in vain did I shape my fingers into a frame, so as to have nothing but the hawthorns before my eyes; the sentiment which they aroused in me remained obscure and vague, struggling and failing to free itself, to float across and become one with the flowers. They themselves offered me no enlightenment, and I could not call upon any other flowers to satisfy this mysterious longing. And then, inspiring me with that rapture which we feel on seeing a work by our favourite painter quite different from any of those that we already know, or, better still, when some one has taken us and set us down in front of a picture of which we have hitherto seen no more than a pencilled sketch, or when a piece of music which we have heard played over on the piano bursts out again in our ears with all the splendour and fullness of an orchestra, my grandfather called me to him, and, pointing to the hedge of Tansonville, said: "You are fond of hawthorns; just look at this pink one; isn't it pretty?"

And it was indeed a hawthorn, but one whose flowers were pink, and lovelier even than the white. It, too, was in holiday attire, for one of those days which are the only true holidays, the holy days of religion, because they are not appointed by any capricious accident, as secular holidays are appointed, upon days which are not specially ordained for such observances, which have nothing about them that is essentially festal—but it was attired even more richly than the rest, for the flowers which clung to its branches, one above another, so thickly as to leave no part of the tree undecorated, like the tassels wreathed about the crook of a rococo shepherdess, were every one of them 'in colour,' and consequently of a superior quality, by the aesthetic standards of Combray, to the 'plain,' if one was to judge by the scale of prices at the 'stores' in the Square, or at Camus's, where the most expensive biscuits were those whose sugar was pink. And for my own part I set a higher value on cream cheese when it was pink, when I had been allowed to tinge it with crushed strawberries. And these flowers had chosen precisely the colour of some edible and delicious thing, or of some exquisite addition to one's costume for a great festival, which colours, inasmuch as they make plain the reason for their superiority, are those whose beauty is most evident to the eyes of children, and for that reason must always seem more vivid and more natural than any other tints, even after the child's mind has realised that they offer no gratification to the appetite, and have not been selected by the dressmaker. And, indeed, I had felt at once, as I had felt before the white blossom, but now still more marvelling, that it was in no artificial manner, by no device of human construction, that the festal intention of these flowers was revealed, but that it was Nature herself who had spontaneously expressed it (with the simplicity of a woman from a village shop, labouring at the decoration of a street altar for some procession) by burying the bush in these little rosettes, almost too ravishing in colour, this rustic 'pompadour.' High up on the branches, like so many of those tiny rose-trees, their pots concealed in jackets of paper lace, whose slender stems rise in a forest from the altar on the greater festivals, a thousand buds were swelling and opening, paler in colour, but each disclosing as it burst, as at the bottom of a cup of pink marble, its blood-red stain, and suggesting even more strongly than the full-blown flowers the special, irresistible quality of the hawthorn-tree, which, wherever it budded, wherever it was about to blossom, could bud and blossom in pink flowers alone. Taking its place in the hedge, but as different from the rest as a young girl in holiday attire among a crowd of dowdy women in everyday clothes, who are staying at home, equipped and ready for the 'Month of Mary,' of which it seemed already to form a part, it shone and smiled in its cool, rosy garments, a Catholic bush indeed, and altogether delightful.

The hedge allowed us a glimpse, inside the park, of an alley bordered with jasmine, pansies, and verbenas, among which the stocks held open their fresh plump purses, of a pink as fragrant and as faded as old Spanish leather, while on the gravel-path a long watering-pipe, painted green, coiling across the ground, poured, where its holes were, over the flowers whose perfume those holes inhaled, a vertical and prismatic fan of infinitesimal, rainbow-coloured drops. Suddenly I stood still, unable to move, as happens when something appears that requires not only our eyes to take it in, but involves a deeper kind of perception and takes possession of the whole of our being. A little girl, with fair, reddish hair, who appeared to be returning from a walk, and held a trowel in her hand, was looking at us, raising towards us a face powdered with pinkish freckles. Her black eyes gleamed, and as I did not at that time know, and indeed have never since learned how to reduce to its objective elements any strong impression, since I had not, as they say, enough 'power of observation' to isolate the sense of their colour, for a long time afterwards, whenever I thought of her, the memory of those bright eyes would at once present itself to me as a vivid azure, since her complexion was fair; so much so that, perhaps, if her eyes had not been quite so black—which was what struck one most forcibly on first meeting her—I should not have been, as I was, especially enamoured of their imagined blue.

I gazed at her, at first with that gaze which is not merely a messenger from the eyes, but in whose window all the senses assemble and lean out, petrified and anxious, that gaze which would fain reach, touch, capture, bear off in triumph the body at which it is aimed, and the soul with the body; then (so frightened was I lest at any moment my grandfather and father, catching sight of the girl, might tear me away from her, by making me run on in front of them) with another, an unconsciously appealing look, whose object was to force her to pay attention to me, to see, to know me. She cast a glance forwards and sideways, so as to take stock of my grandfather and father, and doubtless the impression she formed of them was that we were all absurd people, for she turned away with an indifferent and contemptuous air, withdrew herself so as to spare her face the indignity of remaining within their field of vision; and while they, continuing to walk on without noticing her, had overtaken and passed me, she allowed her eyes to wander, over the space that lay between us, in my direction, without any particular expression, without appearing to have seen me, but with an intensity, a half-hidden smile which I was unable to interpret, according to the instruction I had received in the ways of good breeding, save as a mark of infinite disgust; and her hand, at the same time, sketched in the air an indelicate gesture, for which, when it was addressed in public to a person whom one did not know, the little dictionary of manners which I carried in my mind supplied only one meaning, namely, a deliberate insult.

"Gilberte, come along; what are you doing?" called out in a piercing tone of authority a lady in white, whom I had not seen until that moment, while, a little way beyond her, a gentleman in a suit of linen 'ducks,' whom I did not know either, stared at me with eyes which seemed to be starting from his head; the little girl's smile abruptly faded, and, seizing her trowel, she made off without turning to look again in my direction, with an air of obedience, inscrutable and sly.

And so was wafted to my ears the name of Gilberte, bestowed on me like a talisman which might, perhaps, enable me some day to rediscover her whom its syllables had just endowed with a definite personality, whereas, a moment earlier, she had been only something vaguely seen. So it came to me, uttered across the heads of the stocks and jasmines, pungent and cool as the drops which fell from the green watering-pipe; impregnating and irradiating the zone of pure air through which it had passed, which it set apart and isolated from all other air, with the mystery of the life of her whom its syllables designated to the happy creatures that lived and walked and travelled in her company; unfolding through the arch of the pink hawthorn, which opened at the height of my shoulder, the quintessence of their familiarity—so exquisitely painful to myself—with her, and with all that unknown world of her existence, into which I should never penetrate.

For a moment (while we moved away, and my grandfather murmured: "Poor Swann, what a life they are leading him; fancy sending him away so that she can be left alone with her Charlus—for that was Charlus: I recognised him at once! And the child, too; at her age, to be mixed up in all that!") the impression left on me by the despotic tone in which Gilberte's mother had spoken to her, without her replying, by exhibiting her to me as being obliged to yield obedience to some one else, as not being indeed superior to the whole world, calmed my sufferings somewhat, revived some hope in me, and cooled the ardour of my love. But very soon that love surged up again in me like a reaction by which my humiliated heart was endeavouring to rise to Gilberte's level, or to draw her down to its own. I loved her; I was sorry not to have had the time and the inspiration to insult her, to do her some injury, to force her to keep some memory of me. I knew her to be so beautiful that I should have liked to be able to retrace my steps so as to shake my fist at her and shout, "I think you are hideous, grotesque; you are utterly disgusting!" However, I walked away, carrying with me, then and for ever afterwards, as the first illustration of a type of happiness rendered inaccessible to a little boy of my kind by certain laws of nature which it was impossible to transgress, the picture of a little girl with reddish hair, and a skin freckled with tiny pink marks, who held a trowel in her hand, and smiled as she directed towards me a long and subtle and inexpressive stare. And already the charm with which her name, like a cloud of incense, had filled that archway in the pink hawthorn through which she and I had, together, heard its sound, was beginning to conquer, to cover, to embalm, to beautify everything with which it had any association: her grandparents, whom my own had been so unspeakably fortunate as to know, the glorious profession of a stockholder, even the melancholy neighbourhood of the Champs-Elysées, where she lived in Paris.

"Léonie," said my grandfather on our return, "I wish we had had you with us this afternoon. You would never have known Tansonville. If I had had the courage I would have cut you a branch of that pink hawthorn you used to like so much." And so my grandfather told her the story of our walk, either just to amuse her, or perhaps because there was still some hope that she might be stimulated to rise from her bed and to go out of doors. For in earlier days she had been very fond of Tansonville, and, moreover, Swann's visits had been the last that she had continued to receive, at a time when she had already closed her doors to all the world. And just as, when he called, in these later days, to inquire for her (and she was still the only person in our household whom he would ask to see), she would send down to say that she was tired at the moment and resting, but that she would be happy to see him another time, so, this evening, she said to my grandfather, "Yes, some day when the weather is fine I shall go for a drive as far as the gate of the park." And in saying this she was quite sincere. She would have liked to see Swann and Tansonville again; but the mere wish to do so sufficed for all that remained of her strength, which its fulfilment would have more than exhausted. Sometimes a spell of fine weather made her a little more energetic, she would rise and put on her clothes; but before she had reached the outer room she would be 'tired' again, and would insist on returning to her bed. The process which had begun in her—and in her a little earlier only than it must come to all of us—was the great and general renunciation which old age makes in preparation for death, the chrysalis stage of life, which may be observed wherever life has been unduly prolonged; even in old lovers who have lived for one another with the utmost intensity of passion, and in old friends bound by the closest ties of mental sympathy, who, after a certain year, cease to make the necessary journey, or even to cross the street to see one another, cease to correspond, and know well that they will communicate no more in this world. My aunt must have been perfectly well aware that she would not see Swann again, that she would never leave her own house any more, but this ultimate seclusion seemed to be accepted by her with all the more readiness for the very reason which, to our minds, ought to have made it more unbearable; namely, that such a seclusion was forced upon her by the gradual and steady diminution in her strength which she was able to measure daily, which, by making every action, every movement 'tiring' to her if not actually painful, gave to inaction, isolation and silence the blessed, strengthening and refreshing charm of repose.

My aunt did not go to see the pink hawthorn in the hedge, but at all hours of the day I would ask the rest of my family whether she was not going to go, whether she used not, at one time, to go often to Tansonville, trying to make them speak of Mlle. Swann's parents and grandparents, who appeared to me to be as great and glorious as gods. The name, which had for me become almost mythological, of Swann—when I talked with my family I would grow sick with longing to hear them utter it; I dared not pronounce it myself, but I would draw them into a discussion of matters which led naturally to Gilberte and her family, in which she was involved, in speaking of which I would feel myself not too remotely banished from her company; and I would suddenly force my father (by pretending, for instance, to believe that my grandfather's business had been in our family before his day, or that the hedge with the pink hawthorn which my aunt Léonie wished to visit was on common ground) to correct my statements, to say, as though in opposition to me and of his own accord: "No, no, the business belonged to *Swann's* father, that hedge is part of *Swann's* park." And then I would be obliged to pause for breath; so stifling was the pressure, upon that part of me where it was for ever inscribed, of that name which, at the moment when I heard it, seemed to me fuller, more portentous than any other name, because it was burdened with the weight of all the occasions on which I had secretly uttered it in my mind. It caused me a pleasure which I was ashamed to have dared to demand from my parents, for so great was it that to have procured it for me must have involved them in an immensity of effort, and with no recompense, since for them there was no pleasure in the sound. And so I would prudently turn the conversation. And by a scruple of conscience, also. All the singular seductions which I had stored up in the sound of that word Swann, I found again as soon as it was uttered. And then it occurred to me suddenly that my parents could not fail to experience the same emotions, that they must find themselves sharing my point of view, that they perceived in their turn, that they condoned, that they even embraced my visionary longings, and I was as wretched as though I had ravished and corrupted the innocence of their hearts.

That year my family fixed the day of their return to Paris rather earlier than usual. On the morning of our departure I had had my hair curled, to be ready to face the photographer, had had a new hat carefully set upon my head, and had been buttoned into a velvet jacket; a little later my mother, after searching everywhere for me, found me standing in tears on that steep little hillside close to Tansonville, bidding a long farewell to my hawthorns, clasping their sharp branches to my bosom, and (like a princess in a tragedy, oppressed by the weight of all her senseless jewellery) with no gratitude towards the officious hand which had, in curling those ringlets, been at pains to collect all my hair upon my forehead; trampling underfoot the curl-papers which I had torn from my head, and my new hat with them. My mother was not at all moved by my tears, but she could not suppress a cry at the sight of my battered headgear and my ruined jacket. I did not, however, hear her. "Oh, my poor little hawthorns," I was assuring them through my sobs, "it is not you that want to make me unhappy, to force me to leave you. You, you have never done me any harm. So I shall always love you." And, drying my eyes, I promised them that, when I grew up, I would never copy the foolish example of other men, but that even in Paris, on fine spring days, instead of paying calls and listening to silly talk, I would make excursions into the country to see the first hawthorn-trees in bloom.

Once in the fields we never left them again during the rest of our Méséglise walk. They were perpetually crossed, as though by invisible streams of traffic, by the wind, which was to me the tutelary genius of Combray. Every year, on the day of our arrival, in order to feel that I really was at Combray, I would climb the hill to find it running again through my clothing, and setting me running in its wake. One always had the wind for companion when one went the 'Méséglise way,' on that swelling plain which stretched, mile beyond mile, without any disturbance of its gentle contour. I knew that Mlle. Swann used often to go and spend a few days at Laon, and, for all that it was many miles away, the distance was obviated by the absence of any intervening obstacle; when, on hot afternoons, I would see a breath of wind emerge from the farthest horizon, bowing the heads of the corn in distant fields, pouring like a flood over all that vast expanse, and finally settling down, warm and rustling, among the clover and sainfoin at my feet, that plain which was common to us both seemed then to draw us together, to unite us; I would imagine that the same breath had passed by her also, that there was some message from her in what it was whispering to me, without my being able to understand it, and I would catch and kiss it as it passed. On my left was a village called Champieu (*Campus Pagani*, according to the Curé). On my right I could see across the cornfields the two crocketed, rustic spires of Saint-André-des-Champs, themselves as tapering, scaly, plated, honeycombed, yellowed, and roughened as two ears of wheat.

At regular intervals, among the inimitable ornamentation of their leaves, which can be mistaken for those of no other fruit-tree, the apple-trees were exposing their broad petals of white satin, or hanging in shy bunches their unopened, blushing buds. It was while going the 'Méséglise way' that I first noticed the circular shadow which apple-trees cast upon the sunlit ground, and also those impalpable threads of golden silk which the setting sun weaves slantingly downwards from beneath their leaves, and which I would see my father slash through with his stick without ever making them swerve from their straight path.

Sometimes in the afternoon sky a white moon would creep up like a little cloud, furtive, without display, suggesting an actress who does not have to 'come on' for a while, and so goes 'in front' in her ordinary clothes to watch the rest of the company for a moment, but keeps in the background, not wishing to attract attention to herself. I was glad to find her image reproduced in books and paintings, though these works of art were very different—at least in my earlier years, before Bloch had attuned my eyes and mind to more subtle harmonies—from those in which the moon seems fair to me to-day, but in which I should not have recognised her then. It might be, for instance, some novel by Saintine, some landscape by Gleyre, in which she is cut out sharply against the sky, in the form of a silver sickle, some work as unsophisticated and as incomplete as were, at that date, my own impressions, and which it enraged my grandmother's sisters to see me admire. They held that one ought to set before children, and that children shewed their own innate good taste in admiring, only such books and pictures as they would continue to admire when their minds were developed and mature. No doubt they regarded aesthetic values as material objects which an unclouded vision could not fail to discern, without needing to have their equivalent in experience of life stored up and slowly ripening in one's heart.

It was along the 'Méséglise way,' at Montjouvain, a house built on the edge of a large pond, and overlooked by a steep, shrub-grown hill, that M. Vinteuil lived. And so we used often to meet his daughter driving her dogcart at full speed along the road. After a certain year we never saw her alone, but always accompanied by a friend, a girl older than herself, with an evil reputation in the neighbourhood, who in the end installed herself permanently, one day, at Montjouvain. People said: "That poor M. Vinteuil must be blinded by love not to see what everyone is talking about, and to let his daughter—a man who is horrified if you use a *word* in the wrong sense—bring a woman like that to live under his roof. He says that she is a most superior woman, with a heart of gold, and that she would have shewn extraordinary musical talent if she had only been trained. He may be sure it is not music that she is teaching his daughter." But M. Vinteuil assured them that it was, and indeed it is remarkable that people never fail to arouse admiration of their normal qualities in the relatives of anyone with whom they are in physical intercourse. Bodily passion, which has been so unjustly decried, compels its victims to display every vestige that is in them of unselfishness and generosity, and so effectively that they shine resplendent in the eyes of all beholders. Dr. Percepied, whose loud voice and bushy eyebrows enabled him to play to his heart's content the part of 'double-dealer,' a part to which he was not, otherwise, adapted, without in the least degree compromising his unassailable and quite unmerited reputation of being a kind-hearted old curmudgeon, could make the Curé and everyone else laugh until they cried by saying in a harsh voice: "What d'ye say to this, now? It seems that she plays music with her friend, Mlle. Vinteuil. That surprises you, does it? Oh, I know nothing, nothing at all. It was Papa Vinteuil who told me all about it yesterday. After all, she has every right to be fond of music, that girl. I should never dream of thwarting the artistic vocation of a child; nor Vinteuil either, it seems. And then he plays music too, with his daughter's friend. Why, gracious heavens, it must be a regular musical box, that house out there! What are you laughing at? I say they've been playing too much music, those people. I met Papa Vinteuil the other day, by the cemetery. It was all he could do to keep on his feet."

Anyone who, like ourselves, had seen M. Vinteuil, about this time, avoiding people whom he knew, and turning away as soon as he caught sight of them, changed in a few months into an old man, engulfed in a sea of sorrows, incapable of any effort not directly aimed at promoting his daughter's happiness, spending whole days beside his wife's grave, could hardly have failed to realise that he was gradually dying of a broken heart, could hardly have supposed that he paid no attention to the rumours which were going about. He knew, perhaps he even believed, what his neighbours were saying. There is probably no one, however rigid his virtue, who is not liable to find himself, by the complexity of circumstances, living at close quarters with the very vice which he himself has been most outspoken in condemning, without at first recognising it beneath the disguise which it assumes on entering his presence, so as to wound him and to make him suffer; the odd words, the unaccountable attitude, one evening, of a person whom he has a thousand reasons for loving. But for a man of M. Vinteuil's sensibility it must have been far more painful than for a hardened man of the world to have to resign himself to one of those situations which are wrongly supposed to occur in Bohemian circles only; for they are produced whenever there needs to establish itself in the security necessary to its development a vice which Nature herself has planted in the soul of a child, perhaps by no more than blending the virtues of its father and mother, as she might blend the colours of their eyes. And yet however much M. Vinteuil may have known of his daughter's conduct it did not follow that his adoration of her grew any less. The facts of life do not penetrate to the sphere in which our beliefs are cherished; as it was not they that engendered those beliefs, so they are powerless to destroy them; they can aim at them continual blows of contradiction and disproof without weakening them; and an avalanche of miseries and maladies coming, one after another, without interruption into the bosom of a family, will not make it lose faith in either the clemency of its God or the capacity of its physician. But when M. Vinteuil regarded his daughter and himself from the point of view of the world, and of their reputation, when he attempted to place himself by her side in the rank which they occupied in the general estimation of their neighbours, then he was bound to give judgment, to utter his own and her social condemnation in precisely the terms which the inhabitant of Combray most hostile to him and his daughter would have employed; he saw himself and her in 'low,' in the very 'lowest water,' inextricably stranded; and his manners had of late been tinged with that humility, that respect for persons who ranked above him and to whom he must now look up (however far beneath him they might hitherto have been), that tendency to search for some means of rising again to their level, which is an almost mechanical result of any human misfortune.

One day, when we were walking with Swann in one of the streets of Combray, M. Vinteuil, turning out of another street, found himself so suddenly face to face with us all that he had not time to escape; and Swann, with that almost arrogant charity of a man of the world who, amid the dissolution of all his own moral prejudices, finds in another's shame merely a reason for treating him with a friendly benevolence, the outward signs of which serve to enhance and gratify the self-esteem of the bestower because he feels that they are all the more precious to him upon whom they are bestowed, conversed at great length with M. Vinteuil, with whom for a long time he had been barely on speaking terms, and invited him, before leaving us, to send his daughter over, one day, to play at Tansonville. It was an invitation which, two years earlier, would have enraged M. Vinteuil, but which now filled him with so much gratitude that he felt himself obliged to refrain from the indiscretion of accepting. Swann's friendly regard for his daughter seemed to him to be in itself so honourable, so precious a support for his cause that he felt it would perhaps be better to make no use of it, so as to have the wholly Platonic satisfaction of keeping it in reserve.

"What a charming man!" he said to us, after Swann had gone, with the same enthusiasm and veneration which make clever and pretty women of the middle classes fall victims to the physical and intellectual charms of a duchess, even though she be ugly and a fool. "What a charming man! What a pity that he should have made such a deplorable marriage!"

And then, so strong an element of hypocrisy is there in even the most sincere of men, who cast off, while they are talking to anyone, the opinion they actually hold of him and will express when he is no longer there, my family joined with M. Vinteuil in deploring Swann's marriage, invoking principles and conventions which (all the more because they invoked them in common with him, as though we were all thorough good fellows of the same sort) they appeared to suggest were in no way infringed at Montjouvain. M. Vinteuil did not send his daughter to visit Swann, an omission which Swann was the first to regret. For constantly, after meeting M. Vinteuil, he would remember that he had been meaning for a long time to ask him about some one of the same name as himself, one of his relatives, Swann supposed. And on this occasion he determined that he would not forget what he had to say to him when M. Vinteuil should appear with his daughter at Tansonville.

Since the 'Méséglise way' was the shorter of the two that we used to take for our walks round Combray, and for that reason was reserved for days of uncertain weather, it followed that the climate of Méséglise shewed an unduly high rainfall, and we would never lose sight of the fringe of Roussainville wood, so that we could, at any moment, run for shelter beneath its dense thatch of leaves.

Often the sun would disappear behind a cloud, which impinged on its roundness, but whose edge the sun gilded in return. The brightness, though not the light of day, would then be shut off from a landscape in which all life appeared to be suspended, while the little village of Roussainville carved in relief upon the sky the white mass of its gables, with a startling precision of detail. A gust of wind blew from its perch a rook, which floated away and settled in the distance, while beneath a paling sky the woods on the horizon assumed a deeper tone of blue, as though they were painted in one of those cameos which you still find decorating the walls of old houses.

But on other days would begin to fall the rain, of which we had had due warning from the little barometer-figure which the spectacle-maker hung out in his doorway. Its drops, like migrating birds which fly off in a body at a given moment, would come down out of the sky in close marching order. They would never drift apart, would make no movement at random in their rapid course, but each one, keeping in its place, would draw after it the drop which was following, and the sky would be as greatly darkened as by the swallows flying south. We would take refuge among the trees. And when it seemed that their flight was accomplished, a few last drops, feebler and slower than the rest, would still come down. But we would emerge from our shelter, for the rain was playing a game, now, among the branches, and, even when it was almost dry again underfoot, a stray drop or two, lingering in the hollow of a leaf, would run down and hang glistening from the point of it until suddenly it splashed plump upon our upturned faces from the whole height of the tree.

Often, too, we would hurry for shelter, tumbling in among all its stony saints and patriarchs, into the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs. How typically French that church was! Over its door the saints, the kings of chivalry with lilies in their hands, the wedding scenes and funerals were carved as they might have been in the mind of Françoise. The sculptor had also recorded certain anecdotes of Aristotle and Virgil, precisely as Françoise in her kitchen would break into speech about Saint Louis as though she herself had known him, generally in order to depreciate, by contrast with him, my grandparents, whom she considered less 'righteous.' One could see that the ideas which the mediaeval artist and the mediaeval peasant (who had survived to cook for us in the nineteenth century) had of classical and of early Christian history, ideas whose inaccuracy was atoned for by their honest simplicity, were derived not from books, but from a tradition at once ancient and direct, unbroken, oral, degraded, unrecognisable, and alive. Another Combray person whom I could discern also, potential and typified, in the gothic sculptures of Saint-André-des-Champs was young Théodore, the assistant in Camus's shop. And, indeed, Françoise herself was well aware that she had in him a countryman and contemporary, for when my aunt was too ill for Françoise to be able, unaided, to lift her in her bed or to carry her to her chair, rather than let the kitchen-maid come upstairs and, perhaps, 'make an impression' on my aunt, she would send out for Théodore. And this lad, who was regarded, and quite rightly, in the town as a 'bad character,' was so abounding in that spirit which had served to decorate the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs, and particularly in the feelings of respect due, in Françoise's eyes, to all 'poor invalids,' and, above all, to her own 'poor mistress,' that he had, when he bent down to raise my aunt's head from her pillow, the same air of preraphaelite simplicity and zeal which the little angels in the bas-reliefs wear, who throng, with tapers in their hands, about the deathbed of Our Lady, as though those carved faces of stone, naked and grey like trees in winter, were, like them, asleep only, storing up life and waiting to flower again in countless plebeian faces, reverend and cunning as the face of Théodore, and glowing with the ruddy brilliance of ripe apples.

There, too, not fastened to the wall like the little angels, but detached from the porch, of more than human stature, erect upon her pedestal as upon a footstool, which had been placed there to save her feet from contact with the wet ground, stood a saint with the full cheeks, the firm breasts which swelled out inside her draperies like a cluster of ripe grapes inside a bag, the narrow forehead, short and stubborn nose, deep-set eyes, and strong, thick-skinned, courageous expression of the country-women of those parts. This similarity, which imparted to the statue itself a kindliness that I had not looked to find in it, was corroborated often by the arrival of some girl from the fields, come, like ourselves, for shelter beneath the porch, whose presence there—as when the leaves of a climbing plant have grown up beside leaves carved in stone—seemed intended by fate to allow us, by confronting it with its type in nature, to form a critical estimate of the truth of the work of art. Before our eyes, in the distance, a promised or an accursed land, Roussainville, within whose walls I had never penetrated, Roussainville was now, when the rain had ceased for us, still being chastised, like a village in the Old Testament, by all the innumerable spears and arrows of the storm, which beat down obliquely upon the dwellings of its inhabitants, or else had already received the forgiveness of the Almighty, Who had restored to it the light of His sun, which fell upon it in rays of uneven length, like the rays of a monstrance upon an altar.

Sometimes, when the weather had completely broken, we were obliged to go home and to remain shut up indoors. Here and there, in the distance, in a landscape which, what with the failing light and saturated atmosphere, resembled a seascape rather, a few solitary houses clinging to the lower slopes of a hill whose heights were buried in a cloudy darkness shone out like little boats which had folded their sails and would ride at anchor, all night, upon the sea. But what mattered rain or storm? In summer, bad weather is no more than a passing fit of superficial ill-temper expressed by the permanent, underlying fine weather; a very different thing from the fluid and unstable 'fine weather' of winter, its very opposite, in fact; for has it not (firmly established in the soil, on which it has taken solid form in dense masses of foliage over which the rain may pour in torrents without weakening the resistance offered by their real and lasting happiness) hoisted, to keep them flying throughout the season, in the village streets, on the walls of the houses and in their gardens, its silken banners, violet and white. Sitting in the little parlour, where I would pass the time until dinner with a book, I might hear the water dripping from our chestnut-trees, but I would know that the shower would only glaze and brighten the greenness of their thick, crumpled leaves, and that they themselves had undertaken to remain there, like pledges of summer, all through the rainy night, to assure me of the fine weather's continuing; it might rain as it pleased, but to-morrow, over the white fence of Tansonville, there would surge and flow, numerous as ever, a sea of little heart-shaped leaves; and without the least anxiety I could watch the poplar in the Rue des Perchamps praying for mercy, bowing in desperation before the storm; without the least anxiety I could hear, at the far end of the garden, the last peals of thunder growling among our lilac-trees.

If the weather was bad all morning, my family would abandon the idea of a walk, and I would remain at home. But, later on, I formed the habit of going out by myself on such days, and walking towards Méséglise-la-Vineuse, during that autumn when we had to come to Combray to settle the division of my aunt Léonie's estate; for she had died at last, leaving both parties among her neighbours triumphant in the fact of her demise—those who had insisted that her mode of life was enfeebling and must ultimately kill her, and, equally, those who had always maintained that she suffered from some disease not imaginary, but organic, by the visible proof of which the most sceptical would be obliged to own themselves convinced, once she had succumbed to it; causing no intense grief to any save one of her survivors, but to that one a grief savage in its violence. During the long fortnight of my aunt's last illness Françoise never went out of her room for an instant, never took off her clothes, allowed no one else to do anything for my aunt, and did not leave her body until it was actually in its grave. Then, at last, we understood that the sort of terror in which Françoise had lived of my aunt's harsh words, her suspicions and her anger, had developed in her a sentiment which we had mistaken for hatred, and which was really veneration and love. Her true mistress, whose decisions it had been impossible to foresee, from whose stratagems it had been so hard to escape, of whose good nature it had been so easy to take advantage, her sovereign, her mysterious and omnipotent monarch was no more. Compared with such a mistress we counted for very little. The time had long passed when, on our first coming to spend our holidays at Combray, we had been of equal importance, in Françoise's eyes, with my aunt.

During that autumn my parents, finding the days so fully occupied with the legal formalities that had to be gone through, and discussions with solicitors and farmers, that they had little time for walks which, as it happened, the weather made precarious, began to let me go, without them, along the 'Méséglise way,' wrapped up in a huge Highland plaid which protected me from the rain, and which I was all the more ready to throw over my shoulders because I felt that the stripes of its gaudy tartan scandalised Françoise, whom it was impossible to convince that the colour of one's clothes had nothing whatever to do with one's mourning for the dead, and to whom the grief which we had shewn on my aunt's death was wholly unsatisfactory, since we had not entertained the neighbours to a great funeral banquet, and did not adopt a special tone when we spoke of her, while I at times might be heard humming a tune. I am sure that in a book—and to that extent my feelings were closely akin to those of Françoise—such a conception of mourning, in the manner of the *Chanson de Roland* and of the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs, would have seemed most attractive. But the moment that Françoise herself approached, some evil spirit would urge me to attempt to make her angry, and I would avail myself of the slightest pretext to say to her that I regretted my aunt's death because she had been a good woman in spite of her absurdities, but not in the least because she was my aunt; that she might easily have been my aunt and yet have been so odious that her death would not have caused me a moment's sorrow; statements which, in a book, would have struck me as merely fatuous.

And if Françoise then, inspired like a poet with a flood of confused reflections upon bereavement, grief, and family memories, were to plead her inability to rebut my theories, saying: "I don't know how to *espress* myself"—I would triumph over her with an ironical and brutal common sense worthy of Dr. Percepied; and if she went on: "All the same she was a *geological* relation; there is always the respect due to your *geology*," I would shrug my shoulders and say: "It is really very good of me to discuss the matter with an illiterate old woman who cannot speak her own language," adopting, to deliver judgment on Françoise, the mean and narrow outlook of the pedant, whom those who are most contemptuous of him in the impartiality of their own minds are only too prone to copy when they are obliged to play a part upon the vulgar stage of life.

My walks, that autumn, were all the more delightful because I used to take them after long hours spent over a book. When I was tired of reading, after a whole morning in the house, I would throw my plaid across my shoulders and set out; my body, which in a long spell of enforced immobility had stored up an accumulation of vital energy, was now obliged, like a spinning-top wound and let go, to spend this in every direction. The walls of houses, the Tansonville hedge, the trees of Roussainville wood, the bushes against which Montjouvain leaned its back, all must bear the blows of my walking-stick or umbrella, must hear my shouts of happiness, blows and shouts being indeed no more than expressions of the confused ideas which exhilarated me, and which, not being developed to the point at which they might rest exposed to the light of day, rather than submit to a slow and difficult course of elucidation, found it easier and more pleasant to drift into an immediate outlet. And so it is that the bulk of what appear to be the emotional renderings of our inmost sensations do no more than relieve us of the burden of those sensations by allowing them to escape from us in an indistinct form which does not teach us how it should be interpreted. When I attempt to reckon up all that I owe to the 'Méséglise way,' all the humble discoveries of which it was either the accidental setting or the direct inspiration and cause, I am reminded that it was in that same autumn, on one of those walks, near the bushy precipice which guarded Montjouvain from the rear, that I was struck for the first time by this lack of harmony between our impressions and their normal forms of expression. After an hour of rain and wind, against which I had put up a brisk fight, as I came to the edge of the Montjouvain pond, and reached a little hut, roofed with tiles, in which M. Vinteuil's gardener kept his tools, the sun shone out again, and its golden rays, washed clean by the shower, blazed once more in the sky, on the trees, on the wall of the hut, and on the still wet tiles of the roof, which had a chicken perching upon its ridge. The wind pulled out sideways the wild grass that grew in the wall, and the chicken's downy feathers, both of which things let themselves float upon the wind's breath to their full extent, with the unresisting submissiveness of light and lifeless matter. The tiled roof cast upon the pond, whose reflections were now clear again in the sunlight, a square of pink marble, the like of which I had never observed before. And, seeing upon the water, where it reflected the wall, a pallid smile responding to the smiling sky, I cried aloud in my enthusiasm, brandishing my furled umbrella: "Damn, damn, damn, damn!" But at the same time I felt that I was in duty bound not to content myself with these unilluminating words, but to endeavour to see more clearly into the sources of my enjoyment.

And it was at that moment, too—thanks to a peasant who went past, apparently in a bad enough humour already, but more so when he nearly received my umbrella in his face, and who replied without any cordiality to my "Fine day, what! good to be out walking!"—that I learned that identical emotions do not spring up in the hearts of all men simultaneously, by a pre-established order. Later on I discovered that, whenever I had read for too long and was in a mood for conversation, the friend to whom I would be burning to say something would at that moment have finished indulging himself in the delights of conversation, and wanted nothing now but to be left to read undisturbed. And if I had been thinking with affection of my parents, and forming the most sensible and proper plans for giving them pleasure, they would have been using the same interval of time to discover some misdeed that I had already forgotten, and would begin to scold me severely, just as I flung myself upon them with a kiss.

Sometimes to the exhilaration which I derived from being alone would be added an alternative feeling, so that I could not be clear in my mind to which I should give the casting vote; a feeling stimulated by the desire to see rise up before my eyes a peasant-girl whom I might clasp in my arms. Coming abruptly, and without giving me time to trace it accurately to its source among so many ideas of a very different kind, the pleasure which accompanied this desire seemed only a degree superior to what was given me by my other thoughts. I found an additional merit in everything that was in my mind at the moment, in the pink reflection of the tiled roof, the wild grass in the wall, the village of Roussainville into which I had long desired to penetrate, the trees of its wood and the steeple of its church, created in them by this fresh emotion which made them appear more desirable only because I thought it was they that had provoked it, and which seemed only to wish to bear me more swiftly towards them when it filled my sails with a potent, unknown, and propitious breeze. But if this desire that a woman should appear added for me something more exalting than the charms of nature, they in their turn enlarged what I might, in the woman's charm, have found too much restricted. It seemed to me that the beauty of the trees was hers also, and that, as for the spirit of those horizons, of the village of Roussainville, of the books which I was reading that year, it was her kiss which would make me master of them all; and, my imagination drawing strength from contact with my sensuality, my sensuality expanding through all the realms of my imagination, my desire had no longer any bounds. Moreover—just as in moments of musing contemplation of nature, the normal actions of the mind being suspended, and our abstract ideas of things set on one side, we believe with the profoundest faith in the originality, in the individual existence of the place in which we may happen to be—the passing figure which my desire evoked seemed to be not any one example of the general type of 'woman,' but a necessary and natural product of the soil. For at that time everything which was not myself, the earth and the creatures upon it, seemed to me more precious, more important, endowed with a more real existence than they appear to full-grown men. And between the earth and its creatures I made no distinction. I had a desire for a peasant-girl from Méséglise or Roussainville, for a fisher-girl from Balbec, just as I had a desire for Balbec and Méséglise. The pleasure which those girls were empowered to give me would have seemed less genuine, I should have had no faith in it any longer, if I had been at liberty to modify its conditions as I chose. To meet in Paris a fisher-girl from Balbec or a peasant-girl from Méséglise would have been like receiving the present of a shell which I had never seen upon the beach, or of a fern which I had never found among the woods, would have stripped from the pleasure which she was about to give me all those other pleasures in the thick of which my imagination had enwrapped her. But to wander thus among the woods of Roussainville without a peasant-girl to embrace was to see those woods and yet know nothing of their secret treasure, their deep-hidden beauty. That girl whom I never saw save dappled with the shadows of their leaves, was to me herself a plant of local growth, only taller than the rest, and one whose structure would enable me to approach more closely than in them to the intimate savour of the land from which she had sprung. I could believe this all the more readily (and also that the caresses by which she would bring that savour to my senses were themselves of a particular kind, yielding a pleasure which I could never derive from any but herself) since I was still, and must for long remain, in that period of life when one has not yet separated the fact of this sensual pleasure from the various women in whose company one has tasted it, when one has not reduced it to a general idea which makes one regard them thenceforward as the variable instruments of a pleasure that is always the same. Indeed, that pleasure does not exist, isolated and formulated in the consciousness, as the ultimate object with which one seeks a woman's company, or as the cause of the uneasiness which, in anticipation, one then feels. Hardly even does one think of oneself, but only how to escape from oneself. Obscurely awaited, immanent and concealed, it rouses to such a paroxysm, at the moment when at last it makes itself felt, those other pleasures which we find in the tender glance, in the kiss of her who is by our side, that it seems to us, more than anything else, a sort of transport of gratitude for the kindness of heart of our companion and for her touching predilection of ourselves, which we measure by the benefits, by the happiness that she showers upon us.

Alas, it was in vain that I implored the dungeon-keep of Roussainville, that I begged it to send out to meet me some daughter of its village, appealing to it as to the sole confidant to whom I had disclosed my earliest desire when, from the top floor of our house at Combray, from the little room that smelt of orris-root, I had peered out and seen nothing but its tower, framed in the square of the half-opened window, while, with the heroic scruples of a traveller setting forth for unknown climes, or of a desperate wretch hesitating on the verge of self-destruction, faint with emotion, I explored, across the bounds of my own experience, an untrodden path which, I believed, might lead me to my death, even—until passion spent itself and left me shuddering among the sprays of flowering currant which, creeping in through the window, tumbled all about my body. In vain I called upon it now. In vain I compressed the whole landscape into my field of vision, draining it with an exhaustive gaze which sought to extract from it a female creature. I might go alone as far as the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs: never did I find there the girl whom I should inevitably have met, had I been with my grandfather, and so unable to engage her in conversation. I would fix my eyes, without limit of time, upon the trunk of a distant tree, from behind which she must appear and spring towards me; my closest scrutiny left the horizon barren as before; night was falling; without any hope now would I concentrate my attention, as though to force up out of it the creatures which it must conceal, upon that sterile soil, that stale and outworn land; and it was no longer in lightness of heart, but with sullen anger that I aimed blows at the trees of Roussainville wood, from among which no more living creatures made their appearance than if they had been trees painted on the stretched canvas background of a panorama, when, unable to resign myself to having to return home without having held in my arms the woman I so greatly desired, I was yet obliged to retrace my steps towards Combray, and to admit to myself that the chance of her appearing in my path grew smaller every moment. And if she had appeared, would I have dared to speak to her? I felt that she would have regarded me as mad, for I no longer thought of those desires which came to me on my walks, but were never realized, as being shared by others, or as having any existence apart from myself. They seemed nothing more now than the purely subjective, impotent, illusory creatures of my temperament. They were in no way connected now with nature, with the world of real things, which from now onwards lost all its charm and significance, and meant no more to my life than a purely conventional framework, just as the action of a novel is framed in the railway carriage, on a seat of which a traveller is reading it to pass the time.

And it is perhaps from another impression which I received at Montjouvain, some years later, an impression which at that time was without meaning, that there arose, long afterwards, my idea of that cruel side of human passion called 'sadism.' We shall see, in due course, that for quite another reason the memory of this impression was to play an important part in my life. It was during a spell of very hot weather; my parents, who had been obliged to go away for the whole day, had told me that I might stay out as late as I pleased; and having gone as far as the Montjouvain pond, where I enjoyed seeing again the reflection of the tiled roof of the hut, I had lain down in the shade and gone to sleep among the bushes on the steep slope that rose up behind the house, just where I had waited for my parents, years before, one day when they had gone to call on M. Vinteuil. It was almost dark when I awoke, and I wished to rise and go away, but I saw Mlle. Vinteuil (or thought, at least, that I recognised her, for I had not seen her often at Combray, and then only when she was still a child, whereas she was now growing into a young woman), who probably had just come in, standing in front of me, and only a few feet away from me, in that room in which her father had entertained mine, and which she had now made into a little sitting-room for herself. The window was partly open; the lamp was lighted; I could watch her every movement without her being able to see me; but, had I gone away, I must have made a rustling sound among the bushes, she would have heard me, and might have thought that I had been hiding there in order to spy upon her.

She was in deep mourning, for her father had but lately died. We had not gone to see her; my mother had not cared to go, on account of that virtue which alone in her fixed any bounds to her benevolence—namely, modesty; but she pitied the girl from the depths of her heart. My mother had not forgotten the sad end of M. Vinteuil's life, his complete absorption, first in having to play both mother and nursery-maid to his daughter, and, later, in the suffering which she had caused him; she could see the tortured expression which was never absent from the old man's face in those terrible last years; she knew that he had definitely abandoned the task of transcribing in fair copies the whole of his later work, the poor little pieces, we imagined, of an old music-master, a retired village organist, which, we assumed, were of little or no value in themselves, though we did not despise them, because they were of such great value to him and had been the chief motive of his life before he sacrificed them to his daughter; pieces which, being mostly not even written down, but recorded only in his memory, while the rest were scribbled on loose sheets of paper, and quite illegible, must now remain unknown for ever; my mother thought, also, of that other and still more cruel renunciation to which M. Vinteuil had been driven, that of seeing the girl happily settled, with an honest and respectable future; when she called to mind all this utter and crushing misery that had come upon my aunts' old music-master, she was moved to very real grief, and shuddered to think of that other grief, so different in its bitterness, which Mlle. Vinteuil must now be feeling, tinged with remorse at having virtually killed her father. "Poor M. Vinteuil," my mother would say, "he lived for his daughter, and now he has died for her, without getting his reward. Will he get it now, I wonder, and in what form? It can only come to him from her."

At the far end of Mlle. Vinteuil's sitting-room, on the mantelpiece, stood a small photograph of her father which she went briskly to fetch, just as the sound of carriage wheels was heard from the road outside, then flung herself down on a sofa and drew close beside her a little table on which she placed the photograph, just as, long ago, M. Vinteuil had 'placed' beside him the piece of music which he would have liked to play over to my parents. And then her friend came in. Mlle. Vinteuil greeted her without rising, clasping her hands behind her head, and drew her body to one side of the sofa, as though to 'make room.' But no sooner had she done this than she appeared to feel that she was perhaps suggesting a particular position to her friend, with an emphasis which might well be regarded as importunate. She thought that her friend would prefer, no doubt, to sit down at some distance from her, upon a chair; she felt that she had been indiscreet; her sensitive heart took fright; stretching herself out again over the whole of the sofa, she closed her eyes and began to yawn, so as to indicate that it was a desire to sleep, and that alone, which had made her lie down there. Despite the rude and hectoring familiarity with which she treated her companion I could recognise in her the obsequious and reticent advances, the abrupt scruples and restraints which had characterised her father. Presently she rose and came to the window, where she pretended to be trying to close the shutters and not succeeding.

"Leave them open," said her friend. "I am hot."

"But it's too dreadful! People will see us," Mlle. Vinteuil answered. And then she guessed, probably, that her friend would think that she had uttered these words simply in order to provoke a reply in certain other words, which she seemed, indeed, to wish to hear spoken, but, from prudence, would let her friend be the first to speak. And so, although I could not see her face clearly enough, I am sure that the expression must have appeared on it which my grandmother had once found so delightful, when she hastily went on: "When I say 'see us' I mean, of course, see us reading. It's so dreadful to think that in every trivial little thing you do some one may be overlooking you."

With the instinctive generosity of her nature, a courtesy beyond her control, she refrained from uttering the studied words which, she had felt, were indispensable for the full realisation of her desire. And perpetually, in the depths of her being, a shy and suppliant maiden would kneel before that other element, the old campaigner, battered but triumphant, would intercede with him and oblige him to retire.

"Oh, yes, it is so extremely likely that people are looking at us at this time of night in this densely populated district!" said her friend, with bitter irony. "And what if they are?" she went on, feeling bound to annotate with a malicious yet affectionate wink these words which she was repeating, out of good nature, like a lesson prepared beforehand which, she knew, it would please Mlle. Vinteuil to hear. "And what if they are? All the better that they should see us."

Mlle. Vinteuil shuddered and rose to her feet. In her sensitive and scrupulous heart she was ignorant what words ought to flow, spontaneously, from her lips, so as to produce the scene for which her eager senses clamoured. She reached out as far as she could across the limitations of her true character to find the language appropriate to a vicious young woman such as she longed to be thought, but the words which, she imagined, such a young woman might have uttered with sincerity sounded unreal in her own mouth. And what little she allowed herself to say was said in a strained tone, in which her ingrained timidity paralysed her tendency to freedom and audacity of speech; while she kept on interrupting herself with: "You're sure you aren't cold? You aren't too hot? You don't want to sit and read by yourself? . . .

"Your ladyship's thoughts seem to be rather 'warm' this evening," she concluded, doubtless repeating a phrase which she had heard used, on some earlier occasion, by her friend.

In the V-shaped opening of her crape bodice Mlle. Vinteuil felt the sting of her friend's sudden kiss; she gave a little scream and ran away; and then they began to chase one another about the room, scrambling over the furniture, their wide sleeves fluttering like wings, clucking and crowing like a pair of amorous fowls. At last Mlle. Vinteuil fell down exhausted upon the sofa, where she was screened from me by the stooping body of her friend. But the latter now had her back turned to the little table on which the old music-master's portrait had been arranged. Mlle. Vinteuil realised that her friend would not see it unless her attention were drawn to it, and so exclaimed, as if she herself had just noticed it for the first time: "Oh! there's my father's picture looking at us; I can't think who can have put it there; I'm sure I've told them twenty times, that is not the proper place for it."

I remembered the words that M. Vinteuil had used to my parents in apologising for an obtrusive sheet of music. This photograph was, of course, in common use in their ritual observances, was subjected to daily profanation, for the friend replied in words which were evidently a liturgical response: "Let him stay there. He can't trouble us any longer. D'you think he'd start whining, d'you think he'd pack you out of the house if he could see you now, with the window open, the ugly old monkey?"

To which Mlle. Vinteuil replied, "Oh, please!"—a gentle reproach which testified to the genuine goodness of her nature, not that it was prompted by any resentment at hearing her father spoken of in this fashion (for that was evidently a feeling which she had trained herself, by a long course of sophistries, to keep in close subjection at such moments), but rather because it was the bridle which, so as to avoid all appearance of egotism, she herself used to curb the gratification which her friend was attempting to procure for her. It may well have been, too, that the smiling moderation with which she faced and answered these blasphemies, that this tender and hypocritical rebuke appeared to her frank and generous nature as a particularly shameful and seductive form of that criminal attitude towards life which she was endeavouring to adopt. But she could not resist the attraction of being treated with affection by a woman who had just shewn herself so implacable towards the defenceless dead; she sprang on to the knees of her friend and held out a chaste brow to be kissed; precisely as a daughter would have done to her mother, feeling with exquisite joy that they would thus, between them, inflict the last turn of the screw of cruelty, in robbing M. Vinteuil, as though they were actually rifling his tomb, of the sacred rights of fatherhood. Her friend took the girl's head in her hands and placed a kiss on her brow with a docility prompted by the real affection she had for Mlle. Vinteuil, as well as by the desire to bring what distraction she could into the dull and melancholy life of an orphan.

"Do you know what I should like to do to that old horror?" she said, taking up the photograph. She murmured in Mlle. Vinteuil's ear something that I could not distinguish.

"Oh! You would never dare."

"Not dare to spit on it? On that?" shouted the friend with deliberate brutality.

I heard no more, for Mlle. Vinteuil, who now seemed weary, awkward, preoccupied, sincere, and rather sad, came back to the window and drew the shutters close; but I knew now what was the reward that M. Vinteuil, in return for all the suffering that he had endured in his lifetime, on account of his daughter, had received from her after his death.

And yet I have since reflected that if M. Vinteuil had been able to be present at this scene, he might still, and in spite of everything, have continued to believe in his daughter's soundness of heart, and that he might even, in so doing, have been not altogether wrong. It was true that in all Mlle. Vinteuil's actions the appearance of evil was so strong and so consistent that it would have been hard to find it exhibited in such completeness save in what is nowadays called a 'sadist'; it is behind the footlights of a Paris theatre, and not under the homely lamp of an actual country house, that one expects to see a girl leading her friend on to spit upon the portrait of a father who has lived and died for nothing and no one but herself; and when we find in real life a desire for melodramatic effect, it is generally the 'sadic' instinct that is responsible for it. It is possible that, without being in the least inclined towards 'sadism,' a girl might have shewn the same outrageous cruelty as Mlle. Vinteuil in desecrating the memory and defying the wishes of her dead father, but she would not have given them deliberate expression in an act so crude in its symbolism, so lacking in subtlety; the criminal element in her behaviour would have been less evident to other people, and even to herself, since she would not have admitted to herself that she was doing wrong. But, appearances apart, in Mlle. Vinteuil's soul, at least in the earlier stages, the evil element was probably not unmixed. A 'sadist' of her kind is an artist in evil, which a wholly wicked person could not be, for in that case the evil would not have been external, it would have seemed quite natural to her, and would not even have been distinguishable from herself; and as for virtue, respect for the dead, filial obedience, since she would never have practised the cult of these things, she would take no impious delight in their profanation. 'Sadists' of Mlle. Vinteuil's sort are creatures so purely sentimental, so virtuous by nature, that even sensual pleasure appears to them as something bad, a privilege reserved for the wicked. And when they allow themselves for a moment to enjoy it they endeavour to impersonate, to assume all the outward appearance of wicked people, for themselves and their partners in guilt, so as to gain the momentary illusion of having escaped beyond the control of their own gentle and scrupulous natures into the inhuman world of pleasure. And I could understand how she must have longed for such an escape when I realised that it was impossible for her to effect it. At the moment when she wished to be thought the very antithesis of her father, what she at once suggested to me were the mannerisms, in thought and speech, of the poor old music-master. Indeed, his photograph was nothing; what she really desecrated, what she corrupted into ministering to her pleasures, but what remained between them and her and prevented her from any direct enjoyment of them, was the likeness between her face and his, his mother's blue eyes which he had handed down to her, like some trinket to be kept in the family, those little friendly movements and inclinations which set up between the viciousness of Mlle. Vinteuil and herself a phraseology, a mentality not designed for vice, which made her regard it as not in any way different from the numberless little social duties and courtesies to which she must devote herself every day. It was not evil that gave her the idea of pleasure, that seemed to her attractive; it was pleasure, rather, that seemed evil. And as, every time that she indulged in it, pleasure came to her attended by evil thoughts such as, ordinarily, had no place in her virtuous mind, she came at length to see in pleasure itself something diabolical, to identify it with Evil. Perhaps Mlle. Vinteuil felt that at heart her friend was not altogether bad, not really sincere when she gave vent to those blasphemous utterances. At any rate, she had the pleasure of receiving those kisses on her brow, those smiles, those glances; all feigned, perhaps, but akin in their base and vicious mode of expression to those which would have been discernible on the face of a creature formed not out of kindness and long-suffering, but out of self-indulgence and cruelty. She was able to delude herself for a moment into believing that she was indeed amusing herself in the way in which, with so unnatural an accomplice, a girl might amuse herself who really did experience that savage antipathy towards her father's memory. Perhaps she would not have thought of wickedness as a state so rare, so abnormal, so exotic, one which it was so refreshing to visit, had she been able to distinguish in herself, as in all her fellow-men and women, that indifference to the sufferings which they cause which, whatever names else be given it, is the one true, terrible and lasting form of cruelty.

If the 'Méséglise way' was so easy, it was a very different matter when we took the 'Guermantes way,' for that meant a long walk, and we must make sure, first, of the weather. When we seemed to have entered upon a spell of fine days, when Françoise, in desperation that not a drop was falling upon the 'poor crops,' gazing up at the sky and seeing there only a little white cloud floating here and there upon its calm, azure surface, groaned aloud and exclaimed: "You would say they were nothing more nor less than a lot of dogfish swimming about and sticking up their snouts! Ah, they never think of making it rain a little for the poor labourers! And then when the corn is all ripe, down it will come, rattling all over the place, and think no more of where it is falling than if it was on the sea!"—when my father's appeals to the gardener had met with the same encouraging answer several times in succession, then some one would say, at dinner: "To-morrow, if the weather holds, we might go the Guermantes way." And off we would set, immediately after luncheon, through the little garden gate which dropped us into the Rue des Perchamps, narrow and bent at a sharp angle, dotted with grass-plots over which two or three wasps would spend the day botanising, a street as quaint as its name, from which its odd characteristics and its personality were, I felt, derived; a street for which one might search in vain through the Combray of to-day, for the public school now rises upon its site. But in my dreams of Combray (like those architects, pupils of Viollet-le-Duc, who, fancying that they can detect, beneath a Renaissance rood-loft and an eighteenth-century altar, traces of a Norman choir, restore the whole church to the state in which it probably was in the twelfth century) I leave not a stone of the modern edifice standing, I pierce through it and 'restore' the Rue des Perchamps. And for such reconstruction memory furnishes me with more detailed guidance than is generally at the disposal of restorers; the pictures which it has preserved—perhaps the last surviving in the world to-day, and soon to follow the rest into oblivion—of what Combray looked like in my childhood's days; pictures which, simply because it was the old Combray that traced their outlines upon my mind before it vanished, are as moving—if I may compare a humble landscape with those glorious works, reproductions of which my grandmother was so fond of bestowing on me—as those old engravings of the 'Cenacolo,' or that painting by Gentile Bellini, in which one sees, in a state in which they no longer exist, the masterpiece of Leonardo and the portico of Saint Mark's.

We would pass, in the Rue de l'Oiseau, before the old hostelry of the Oiseau Flesché, into whose great courtyard, once upon a time, would rumble the coaches of the Duchesses de Montpensier, de Guermantes, and de Montmorency, when they had to come down to Combray for some litigation with their farmers, or to receive homage from them. We would come at length to the Mall, among whose treetops I could distinguish the steeple of Saint-Hilaire. And I should have liked to be able to sit down and spend the whole day there, reading and listening to the bells, for it was so charming there and so quiet that, when an hour struck, you would have said not that it broke in upon the calm of the day, but that it relieved the day of its superfluity, and that the steeple, with the indolent, painstaking exactitude of a person who has nothing else to do, had simply, in order to squeeze out and let fall the few golden drops which had slowly and naturally accumulated in the hot sunlight, pressed, at a given moment, the distended surface of the silence.

The great charm of the 'Guermantes' way was that we had beside us, almost all the time, the course of the Vivonne. We crossed it first, ten minutes after leaving the house, by a foot-bridge called the Pont-Vieux. And every year, when we arrived at Combray, on Easter morning, after the sermon, if the weather was fine, I would run there to see (amid all the disorder that prevails on the morning of a great festival, the gorgeous preparations for which make the everyday household utensils that they have not contrived to banish seem more sordid than ever) the river flowing past, sky-blue already between banks still black and bare, its only companions a clump of daffodils, come out before their time, a few primroses, the first in flower, while here and there burned the blue flame of a violet, its stem bent beneath the weight of the drop of perfume stored in its tiny horn. The Pont-Vieux led to a tow-path which, at this point, would be overhung in summer by the bluish foliage of a hazel, under which a fisherman in a straw hat seemed to have taken root. At Combray, where I knew everyone, and could always detect the blacksmith or grocer's boy through his disguise of a beadle's uniform or chorister's surplice, this fisherman was the only person whom I was never able to identify. He must have known my family, for he used to raise his hat when we passed; and then I would always be just on the point of asking his name, when some one would make a sign to me to be quiet, or I would frighten the fish. We would follow the tow-path which ran along the top of a steep bank, several feet above the stream. The ground on the other side was lower, and stretched in a series of broad meadows as far as the village and even to the distant railway-station. Over these were strewn the remains, half-buried in the long grass, of the castle of the old Counts of Combray, who, during the Middle Ages, had had on this side the course of the Vivonne as a barrier and defence against attack from the Lords of Guermantes and Abbots of Martinville. Nothing was left now but a few stumps of towers, hummocks upon the broad surface of the fields, hardly visible, broken battlements over which, in their day, the bowmen had hurled down stones, the watchmen had gazed out over Novepont, Clairefontaine, Martinville-le-Sec, Bailleau-l'Exempt, fiefs all of them of Guermantes, a ring in which Combray was locked; but fallen among the grass now, levelled with the ground, climbed and commanded by boys from the Christian Brothers' school, who came there in their playtime, or with lesson-books to be conned; emblems of a past that had sunk down and well-nigh vanished under the earth, that lay by the water's edge now, like an idler taking the air, yet giving me strong food for thought, making the name of Combray connote to me not the little town of to-day only, but an historic city vastly different, seizing and holding my imagination by the remote, incomprehensible features which it half-concealed beneath a spangled veil of buttercups. For the buttercups grew past numbering on this spot which they had chosen for their games among the grass, standing singly, in couples, in whole companies, yellow as the yolk of eggs, and glowing with an added lustre, I felt, because, being powerless to consummate with my palate the pleasure which the sight of them never failed to give me, I would let it accumulate as my eyes ranged over their gilded expanse, until it had acquired the strength to create in my mind a fresh example of absolute, unproductive beauty; and so it had been from my earliest childhood, when from the tow-path I had stretched out my arms towards them, before even I could pronounce their charming name—a name fit for the Prince in some French fairy-tale; colonists, perhaps, in some far distant century from Asia, but naturalised now for ever in the village, well satisfied with their modest horizon, rejoicing in the sunshine and the water's edge, faithful to their little glimpse of the railway-station; yet keeping, none the less, as do some of our old paintings, in their plebeian simplicity, a poetic scintillation from the golden East.

I would amuse myself by watching the glass jars which the boys used to lower into the Vivonne, to catch minnows, and which, filled by the current of the stream, in which they themselves also were enclosed, at once 'containers' whose transparent sides were like solidified water and 'contents' plunged into a still larger container of liquid, flowing crystal, suggested an image of coolness more delicious and more provoking than the same water in the same jars would have done, standing upon a table laid for dinner, by shewing it as perpetually in flight between the impalpable water, in which my hands could not arrest it, and the insoluble glass, in which my palate could not enjoy it. I decided that I would come there again with a line and catch fish; I begged for and obtained a morsel of bread from our luncheon basket; and threw into the Vivonne pellets which had the power, it seemed, to bring about a chemical precipitation, for the water at once grew solid round about them in oval clusters of emaciated tadpoles, which until then it had, no doubt, been holding in solution, invisible, but ready and alert to enter the stage of crystallisation.

Presently the course of the Vivonne became choked with water-plants. At first they appeared singly, a lily, for instance, which the current, across whose path it had unfortunately grown, would never leave at rest for a moment, so that, like a ferry-boat mechanically propelled, it would drift over to one bank only to return to the other, eternally repeating its double journey. Thrust towards the bank, its stalk would be straightened out, lengthened, strained almost to breaking-point until the current again caught it, its green moorings swung back over their anchorage and brought the unhappy plant to what might fitly be called its starting-point, since it was fated not to rest there a moment before moving off once again. I would still find it there, on one walk after another, always in the same helpless state, suggesting certain victims of neurasthenia, among whom my grandfather would have included my aunt Léonie, who present without modification, year after year, the spectacle of their odd and unaccountable habits, which they always imagine themselves to be on the point of shaking off, but which they always retain to the end; caught in the treadmill of their own maladies and eccentricities, their futile endeavours to escape serve only to actuate its mechanism, to keep in motion the clockwork of their strange, ineluctable, fatal daily round. Such as these was the water-lily, and also like one of those wretches whose peculiar torments, repeated indefinitely throughout eternity, aroused the curiosity of Dante, who would have inquired of them at greater length and in fuller detail from the victims themselves, had not Virgil, striding on ahead, obliged him to hasten after him at full speed, as I must hasten after my parents.

But farther on the current slackened, where the stream ran through a property thrown open to the public by its owner, who had made a hobby of aquatic gardening, so that the little ponds into which the Vivonne was here diverted were aflower with water-lilies. As the banks at this point were thickly wooded, the heavy shade of the trees gave the water a background which was ordinarily dark green, although sometimes, when we were coming home on a calm evening after a stormy afternoon, I have seen in its depths a clear, crude blue that was almost violet, suggesting a floor of Japanese cloisonné. Here and there, on the surface, floated, blushing like a strawberry, the scarlet heart of a lily set in a ring of white petals.

Beyond these the flowers were more frequent, but paler, less glossy, more thickly seeded, more tightly folded, and disposed, by accident, in festoons so graceful that I would fancy I saw floating upon the stream, as though after the dreary stripping of the decorations used in some Watteau festival, moss-roses in loosened garlands. Elsewhere a corner seemed to be reserved for the commoner kinds of lily; of a neat pink or white like rocket-flowers, washed clean like porcelain, with housewifely care; while, a little farther again, were others, pressed close together in a floating garden-bed, as though pansies had flown out of a garden like butterflies and were hovering with blue and burnished wings over the transparent shadowiness of this watery border; this skiey border also, for it set beneath the flowers a soil of a colour more precious, more moving than their own; and both in the afternoon, when it sparkled beneath the lilies in the kaleidoscope of a happiness silent, restless, and alert, and towards evening, when it was filled like a distant heaven with the roseate dreams of the setting sun, incessantly changing and ever remaining in harmony, about the more permanent colour of the flowers themselves, with the utmost profundity, evanescence, and mystery—with a quiet suggestion of infinity; afternoon or evening, it seemed to have set them flowering in the heart of the sky.

After leaving this park the Vivonne began to flow again more swiftly. How often have I watched, and longed to imitate, when I should be free to live as I chose, a rower who had shipped his oars and lay stretched out on his back, his head down, in the bottom of his boat, letting it drift with the current, seeing nothing but the sky which slipped quietly above him, shewing upon his features a foretaste of happiness and peace.

We would sit down among the irises at the water's edge. In the holiday sky a lazy cloud streamed out to its full length. Now and then, crushed by the burden of idleness, a carp would heave up out of the water, with an anxious gasp. It was time for us to feed. Before starting homewards we would sit for a long time there, eating fruit and bread and chocolate, on the grass, over which came to our ears, horizontal, faint, but solid still and metallic, the sound of the bells of Saint-Hilaire, which had melted not at all in the atmosphere it was so well accustomed to traverse, but, broken piecemeal by the successive palpitation of all their sonorous strokes, throbbed as it brushed the flowers at our feet.

Sometimes, at the water's edge and embedded in trees, we would come upon a house of the kind called 'pleasure houses,' isolated and lost, seeing nothing of the world, save the river which bathed its feet. A young woman, whose pensive face and fashionable veils did not suggest a local origin, and who had doubtless come there, in the popular phrase, 'to bury herself,' to taste the bitter sweetness of feeling that her name, and still more the name of him whose heart she had once held, but had been unable to keep, were unknown there, stood framed in a window from which she had no outlook beyond the boat that was moored beside her door. She raised her eyes with an air of distraction when she heard, through the trees that lined the bank, the voices of passers-by of whom, before they came in sight, she might be certain that never had they known, nor would they know, the faithless lover, that nothing in their past lives bore his imprint, which nothing in their future would have occasion to receive. One felt that in her renunciation of life she had willingly abandoned those places in which she would at least have been able to see him whom she loved, for others where he had never trod. And I watched her, as she returned from some walk along a road where she had known that he would not appear, drawing from her submissive fingers long gloves of a precious, useless charm.

Never, in the course of our walks along the 'Guermantes way,' might we penetrate as far as the source of the Vivonne, of which I had often thought, which had in my mind so abstract, so ideal an existence, that I had been as much surprised when some one told me that it was actually to be found in the same department, and at a given number of miles from Combray, as I had been on the day when I had learned that there was another fixed point somewhere on the earth's surface, where, according to the ancients, opened the jaws of Hell. Nor could we ever reach that other goal, to which I longed so much to attain, Guermantes itself. I knew that it was the residence of its proprietors, the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, I knew that they were real personages who did actually exist, but whenever I thought about them I pictured them to myself either in tapestry, as was the 'Coronation of Esther' which hung in our church, or else in changing, rainbow colours, as was Gilbert the Bad in his window, where he passed from cabbage green, when I was dipping my fingers in the holy water stoup, to plum blue when I had reached our row of chairs, or again altogether impalpable, like the image of Geneviève de Brabant, ancestress of the Guermantes family, which the magic lantern sent wandering over the curtains of my room or flung aloft upon the ceiling—in short, always wrapped in the mystery of the Merovingian age, and bathed, as in a sunset, in the orange light which glowed from the resounding syllable 'antes.' And if, in spite of that, they were for me, in their capacity as a duke and a duchess, real people, though of an unfamiliar kind, this ducal personality was in its turn enormously distended, immaterialised, so as to encircle and contain that Guermantes of which they were duke and duchess, all that sunlit 'Guermantes way' of our walks, the course of the Vivonne, its water-lilies and its overshadowing trees, and an endless series of hot summer afternoons. And I knew that they bore not only the titles of Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, but that since the fourteenth century, when, after vain attempts to conquer its earlier lords in battle, they had allied themselves by marriage, and so became Counts of Combray, the first citizens, consequently, of the place, and yet the only ones among its citizens who did not reside in it—Comtes de Combray, possessing Combray, threading it on their string of names and titles, absorbing it in their personalities, and illustrating, no doubt, in themselves that strange and pious melancholy which was peculiar to Combray; proprietors of the town, though not of any particular house there; dwelling, presumably, out of doors, in the street, between heaven and earth, like that Gilbert de Guermantes, of whom I could see, in the stained glass of the apse of Saint-Hilaire, only the 'other side' in dull black lacquer, if I raised my eyes to look for him, when I was going to Camus's for a packet of salt.

And then it happened that, going the 'Guermantes way,' I passed occasionally by a row of well-watered little gardens, over whose hedges rose clusters of dark blossom. I would stop before them, hoping to gain some precious addition to my experience, for I seemed to have before my eyes a fragment of that riverside country which I had longed so much to see and know since coming upon a description of it by one of my favourite authors. And it was with that story-book land, with its imagined soil intersected by a hundred bubbling watercourses, that Guermantes, changing its form in my mind, became identified, after I heard Dr. Percepied speak of the flowers and the charming rivulets and fountains that were to be seen there in the ducal park. I used to dream that Mme. de Guermantes, taking a sudden capricious fancy for myself, invited me there, that all day long she stood fishing for trout by my side. And when evening came, holding my hand in her own, as we passed by the little gardens of her vassals, she would point out to me the flowers that leaned their red and purple spikes along the tops of the low walls, and would teach me all their names. She would make me tell her, too, all about the poems that I meant to compose. And these dreams reminded me that, since I wished, some day, to become a writer, it was high time to decide what sort of books I was going to write. But as soon as I asked myself the question, and tried to discover some subjects to which I could impart a philosophical significance of infinite value, my mind would stop like a clock, I would see before me vacuity, nothing, would feel either that I was wholly devoid of talent, or that, perhaps, a malady of the brain was hindering its development. Sometimes I would depend upon my father's arranging everything for me. He was so powerful, in such favour with the people who 'really counted,' that he made it possible for us to transgress laws which Françoise had taught me to regard as more ineluctable than the laws of life and death, as when we were allowed to postpone for a year the compulsory repainting of the walls of our house, alone among all the houses in that part of Paris, or when he obtained permission from the Minister for Mme. Sazerat's son, who had been ordered to some watering-place, to take his degree two months before the proper time, among the candidates whose surnames began with 'A,' instead of having to wait his turn as an 'S.' If I had fallen seriously ill, if I had been captured by brigands, convinced that my father's understanding with the supreme powers was too complete, that his letters of introduction to the Almighty were too irresistible for my illness or captivity to turn out anything but vain illusions, in which there was no danger actually threatening me, I should have awaited with perfect composure the inevitable hour of my return to comfortable realities, of my deliverance from bondage or restoration to health. Perhaps this want of talent, this black cavity which gaped in my mind when I ransacked it for the theme of my future writings, was itself no more, either, than an unsubstantial illusion, and would be brought to an end by the intervention of my father, who would arrange with the Government and with Providence that I should be the first writer of my day. But at other times, while my parents were growing impatient at seeing me loiter behind instead of following them, my actual life, instead of seeming an artificial creation by my father, and one which he could modify as he chose, appeared, on the contrary, to be comprised in a larger reality which had not been created for my benefit, from whose judgments there was no appeal, in the heart of which I was bound, helpless, without friend or ally, and beyond which no further possibilities lay concealed. It was evident to me then that I existed in the same manner as all other men, that I must grow old, that I must die like them, and that among them I was to be distinguished merely as one of those who have no aptitude for writing. And so, utterly despondent, I renounced literature for ever, despite the encouragements that had been given me by Bloch. This intimate, spontaneous feeling, this sense of the nullity of my intellect, prevailed against all the flattering speeches that might be lavished upon me, as a wicked man, when everyone is loud in the praise of his good deeds, is gnawed by the secret remorse of conscience.

One day my mother said: "You are always talking about Mme. de Guermantes. Well, Dr. Percepied did a great deal for her when she was ill, four years ago, and so she is coming to Combray for his daughter's wedding. You will be able to see her in church." It was from Dr. Percepied, as it happened, that I had heard most about Mme. de Guermantes, and he had even shewn us the number of an illustrated paper in which she was depicted in the costume which she had worn at a fancy dress ball given by the Princesse de Léon.

Suddenly, during the nuptial mass, the beadle, by moving to one side, enabled me to see, sitting in a chapel, a lady with fair hair and a large nose, piercing blue eyes, a billowy scarf of mauve silk, glossy and new and brilliant, and a little spot at the corner of her nose. And because on the surface of her face, which was red, as though she had been very warm, I could make out, diluted and barely perceptible, details which resembled the portrait that had been shewn to me; because, more especially, the particular features which I remarked in this lady, if I attempted to catalogue them, formulated themselves in precisely the same terms:—*a large nose, blue eyes,* as Dr. Percepied had used when describing in my presence the Duchesse de Guermantes, I said to myself: "This lady is like the Duchesse de Guermantes." Now the chapel from which she was following the service was that of Gilbert the Bad; beneath its flat tombstones, yellowed and bulging like cells of honey in a comb, rested the bones of the old Counts of Brabant; and I remembered having heard it said that this chapel was reserved for the Guermantes family, whenever any of its members came to attend a ceremony at Combray; there was, indeed, but one woman resembling the portrait of Mme. de Guermantes who on that day, the very day on which she was expected to come there, could be sitting in that chapel: it was she! My disappointment was immense. It arose from my not having borne in mind, when I thought of Mme. de Guermantes, that I was picturing her to myself in the colours of a tapestry or a painted window, as living in another century, as being of another substance than the rest of the human race. Never had I taken into account that she might have a red face, a mauve scarf like Mme. Sazerat; and the oval curve of her cheeks reminded me so strongly of people whom I had seen at home that the suspicion brushed against my mind (though it was immediately banished) that this lady in her creative principle, in the molecules of her physical composition, was perhaps not substantially the Duchesse de Guermantes, but that her body, in ignorance of the name that people had given it, belonged to a certain type of femininity which included, also, the wives of doctors and tradesmen. "It is, it must be Mme. de Guermantes, and no one else!" were the words underlying the attentive and astonished expression with which I was gazing upon this image, which, naturally enough, bore no resemblance to those that had so often, under the same title of 'Mme. de Guermantes,' appeared to me in dreams, since this one had not been, like the others, formed arbitrarily by myself, but had sprung into sight for the first time, only a moment ago, here in church; an image which was not of the same nature, was not colourable at will, like those others that allowed themselves to imbibe the orange tint of a sonorous syllable, but which was so real that everything, even to the fiery little spot at the corner of her nose, gave an assurance of her subjection to the laws of life, as in a transformation scene on the stage a crease in the dress of a fairy, a quivering of her tiny finger, indicate the material presence of a living actress before our eyes, whereas we were uncertain, till then, whether we were not looking merely at a projection of limelight from a lantern.

Meanwhile I was endeavouring to apply to this image, which the prominent nose, the piercing eyes pinned down and fixed in my field of vision (perhaps because it was they that had first struck it, that had made the first impression on its surface, before I had had time to wonder whether the woman who thus appeared before me might possibly be Mme. de Guermantes), to this fresh and unchanging image the idea: "It is Mme. de Guermantes"; but I succeeded only in making the idea pass between me and the image, as though they were two discs moving in separate planes, with a space between. But this Mme. de Guermantes of whom I had so often dreamed, now that I could see that she had a real existence independent of myself, acquired a fresh increase of power over my imagination, which, paralysed for a moment by contact with a reality so different from anything that it had expected, began to react and to say within me: "Great and glorious before the days of Charlemagne, the Guermantes had the right of life and death over their vassals; the Duchesse de Guermantes descends from Geneviève de Brabant. She does not know, nor would she consent to know, any of the people who are here to-day."

And then—oh, marvellous independence of the human gaze, tied to the human face by a cord so loose, so long, so elastic that it can stray, alone, as far as it may choose—while Mme. de Guermantes sat in the chapel above the tombs of her dead ancestors, her gaze lingered here and wandered there, rose to the capitals of the pillars, and even rested upon myself, like a ray of sunlight straying down the nave, but a ray of sunlight which, at the moment when I received its caress, appeared conscious of where it fell. As for Mme. de Guermantes herself, since she remained there motionless, sitting like a mother who affects not to notice the rude or awkward conduct of her children who, in the course of their play, are speaking to people whom she does not know, it was impossible for me to determine whether she approved or condemned the vagrancy of her eyes in the careless detachment of her heart.

I felt it to be important that she should not leave the church before I had been able to look long enough upon her, reminding myself that for years past I had regarded the sight of her as a thing eminently to be desired, and I kept my eyes fixed on her, as though by gazing at her I should be able to carry away and incorporate, to store up, for later reference, in myself the memory of that prominent nose, those red cheeks, of all those details which struck me as so much precious, authentic, unparalleled information with regard to her face. And now that, whenever I brought my mind to bear upon that face—and especially, perhaps, in my determination, that form of the instinct of self-preservation with which we guard everything that is best in ourselves, not to admit that I had been in any way deceived—I found only beauty there; setting her once again (since they were one and the same person, this lady who sat before me and that Duchesse de Guermantes whom, until then, I had been used to conjure into an imagined shape) apart from and above that common run of humanity with which the sight, pure and simple, of her in the flesh had made me for a moment confound her, I grew indignant when I heard people saying, in the congregation round me: "She is better looking than Mme. Sazerat" or "than Mlle. Vinteuil," as though she had been in any way comparable with them. And my gaze resting upon her fair hair, her blue eyes, the lines of her neck, and overlooking the features which might have reminded me of the faces of other women, I cried out within myself, as I admired this deliberately unfinished sketch: "How lovely she is! What true nobility! it is indeed a proud Guermantes, the descendant of Geneviève de Brabant, that I have before me!" And the care which I took to focus all my attention upon her face succeeded in isolating it so completely that to-day, when I call that marriage ceremony to mind, I find it impossible to visualise any single person who was present except her, and the beadle who answered me in the affirmative when I inquired whether the lady was, indeed, Mme. de Guermantes. But her, I can see her still quite clearly, especially at the moment when the procession filed into the sacristy, lighted by the intermittent, hot sunshine of a windy and rainy day, where Mme. de Guermantes found herself in the midst of all those Combray people whose names, even, she did not know, but whose inferiority proclaimed her own supremacy so loud that she must, in return, feel for them a genuine, pitying sympathy, and whom she might count on impressing even more forcibly by virtue of her simplicity and natural charm. And then, too, since she could not bring into play the deliberate glances, charged with a definite meaning, which one directs, in a crowd, towards people whom one knows, but must allow her vague thoughts to escape continually from her eyes in a flood of blue light which she was powerless to control, she was anxious not to distress in any way, not to seem to be despising those humbler mortals over whom that current flowed, by whom it was everywhere arrested. I can see again to-day, above her mauve scarf, silky and buoyant, the gentle astonishment in her eyes, to which she had added, without daring to address it to anyone in particular, but so that everyone might enjoy his share of it, the almost timid smile of a sovereign lady who seems to be making an apology for her presence among the vassals whom she loves. This smile rested upon myself, who had never ceased to follow her with my eyes. And I, remembering the glance which she had let fall upon me during the service, blue as a ray of sunlight that had penetrated the window of Gilbert the Bad, said to myself, "Of course, she is thinking about me." I fancied that I had found favour in her sight, that she would continue to think of me after she had left the church, and would, perhaps, grow pensive again, that evening, at Guermantes, on my account. And at once I fell in love with her, for if it is sometimes enough to make us love a woman that she looks on us with contempt, as I supposed Mlle. Swann to have done, while we imagine that she cannot ever be ours, it is enough, also, sometimes that she looks on us kindly, as Mme. de Guermantes did then, while we think of her as almost ours already. Her eyes waxed blue as a periwinkle flower, wholly beyond my reach, yet dedicated by her to me; and the sun, bursting out again from behind a threatening cloud and darting the full force of its rays on to the Square and into the sacristy, shed a geranium glow over the red carpet laid down for the wedding, along which Mme. de Guermantes smilingly advanced, and covered its woollen texture with a nap of rosy velvet, a bloom of light, giving it that sort of tenderness, of solemn sweetness in the pomp of a joyful celebration, which characterises certain pages of *Lohengrin*, certain paintings by Carpaccio, and makes us understand how Baudelaire was able to apply to the sound of the trumpet the epithet 'delicious.'

How often, after that day, in the course of my walks along the 'Guermantes way,' and with what an intensified melancholy did I reflect on my lack of qualification for a literary career, and that I must abandon all hope of ever becoming a famous author. The regret that I felt for this, while I lingered alone to dream for a little by myself, made me suffer so acutely that, in order not to feel it, my mind of its own accord, by a sort of inhibition in the instant of pain, ceased entirely to think of verse-making, of fiction, of the poetic future on which my want of talent precluded me from counting. Then, quite apart from all those literary preoccupations, and without definite attachment to anything, suddenly a roof, a gleam of sunlight reflected from a stone, the smell of a road would make me stop still, to enjoy the special pleasure that each of them gave me, and also because they appeared to be concealing, beneath what my eyes could see, something which they invited me to approach and seize from them, but which, despite all my efforts, I never managed to discover. As I felt that the mysterious object was to be found in them, I would stand there in front of them, motionless, gazing, breathing, endeavouring to penetrate with my mind beyond the thing seen or smelt. And if I had then to hasten after my grandfather, to proceed on my way, I would still seek to recover my sense of them by closing my eyes; I would concentrate upon recalling exactly the line of the roof, the colour of the stone, which, without my being able to understand why, had seemed to me to be teeming, ready to open, to yield up to me the secret treasure of which they were themselves no more than the outer coverings. It was certainly not any impression of this kind that could or would restore the hope I had lost of succeeding one day in becoming an author and poet, for each of them was associated with some material object devoid of any intellectual value, and suggesting no abstract truth. But at least they gave me an unreasoning pleasure, the illusion of a sort of fecundity of mind; and in that way distracted me from the tedium, from the sense of my own impotence which I had felt whenever I had sought a philosophic theme for some great literary work. So urgent was the task imposed on my conscience by these impressions of form or perfume or colour—to strive for a perception of what lay hidden beneath them, that I was never long in seeking an excuse which would allow me to relax so strenuous an effort and to spare myself the fatigue that it involved. As good luck would have it, my parents called me; I felt that I had not, for the moment, the calm environment necessary for a successful pursuit of my researches, and that it would be better to think no more of the matter until I reached home, and not to exhaust myself in the meantime to no purpose. And so I concerned myself no longer with the mystery that lay hidden in a form or a perfume, quite at ease in my mind, since I was taking it home with me, protected by its visible and tangible covering, beneath which I should find it still alive, like the fish which, on days when I had been allowed to go out fishing, I used to carry back in my basket, buried in a couch of grass which kept them cool and fresh. Once in the house again I would begin to think of something else, and so my mind would become littered (as my room was with the flowers that I had gathered on my walks, or the odds and ends that people had given me) with a stone from the surface of which the sunlight was reflected, a roof, the sound of a bell, the smell of fallen leaves, a confused mass of different images, under which must have perished long ago the reality of which I used to have some foreboding, but which I never had the energy to discover and bring to light. Once, however, when we had prolonged our walk far beyond its ordinary limits, and so had been very glad to encounter, half way home, as afternoon darkened into evening, Dr. Percepied, who drove past us at full speed in his carriage, saw and recognised us, stopped, and made us jump in beside him, I received an impression of this sort which I did not abandon without having first subjected it to an examination a little more thorough. I had been set on the box beside the coachman, we were going like the wind because the Doctor had still, before returning to Combray, to call at Martinville-le-Sec, at the house of a patient, at whose door he asked us to wait for him. At a bend in the road I experienced, suddenly, that special pleasure, which bore no resemblance to any other, when I caught sight of the twin steeples of Martinville, on which the setting sun was playing, while the movement of the carriage and the windings of the road seemed to keep them continually changing their position; and then of a third steeple, that of Vieuxvicq, which, although separated from them by a hill and a valley, and rising from rather higher ground in the distance, appeared none the less to be standing by their side.

In ascertaining and noting the shape of their spires, the changes of aspect, the sunny warmth of their surfaces, I felt that I was not penetrating to the full depth of my impression, that something more lay behind that mobility, that luminosity, something which they seemed at once to contain and to conceal.

The steeples appeared so distant, and we ourselves seemed to come so little nearer them, that I was astonished when, a few minutes later, we drew up outside the church of Martinville. I did not know the reason for the pleasure which I had found in seeing them upon the horizon, and the business of trying to find out what that reason was seemed to me irksome; I wished only to keep in reserve in my brain those converging lines, moving in the sunshine, and, for the time being, to think of them no more. And it is probable that, had I done so, those two steeples would have vanished for ever, in a great medley of trees and roofs and scents and sounds which I had noticed and set apart on account of the obscure sense of pleasure which they gave me, but without ever exploring them more fully. I got down from the box to talk to my parents while we were waiting for the Doctor to reappear. Then it was time to start; I climbed up again to my place, turning my head to look back, once more, at my steeples, of which, a little later, I caught a farewell glimpse at a turn in the road. The coachman, who seemed little inclined for conversation, having barely acknowledged my remarks, I was obliged, in default of other society, to fall back on my own, and to attempt to recapture the vision of my steeples. And presently their outlines and their sunlit surface, as though they had been a sort of rind, were stripped apart; a little of what they had concealed from me became apparent; an idea came into my mind which had not existed for me a moment earlier, framed itself in words in my head; and the pleasure with which the first sight of them, just now, had filled me was so much enhanced that, overpowered by a sort of intoxication, I could no longer think of anything but them. At this point, although we had now travelled a long way from Martinville, I turned my head and caught sight of them again, quite black this time, for the sun had meanwhile set. Every few minutes a turn in the road would sweep them out of sight; then they shewed themselves for the last time, and so I saw them no more.

Without admitting to myself that what lay buried within the steeples of Martinville must be something analogous to a charming phrase, since it was in the form of words which gave me pleasure that it had appeared to me, I borrowed a pencil and some paper from the Doctor, and composed, in spite of the jolting of the carriage, to appease my conscience and to satisfy my enthusiasm, the following little fragment, which I have since discovered, and now reproduce, with only a slight revision here and there.

Alone, rising from the level of the plain, and seemingly lost in that expanse of open country, climbed to the sky the twin steeples of Martinville. Presently we saw three: springing into position confronting them by a daring volt, a third, a dilatory steeple, that of Vieuxvicq, was come to join them. The minutes passed, we were moving rapidly, and yet the three steeples were always a long way ahead of us, like three birds perched upon the plain, motionless and conspicuous in the sunlight. Then the steeple of Vieuxvicq withdrew, took its proper distance, and the steeples of Martinville remained alone, gilded by the light of the setting sun, which, even at that distance, I could see playing and smiling upon their sloped sides. We had been so long in approaching them that I was thinking of the time that must still elapse before we could reach them when, of a sudden, the carriage, having turned a corner, set us down at their feet; and they had flung themselves so abruptly in our path that we had barely time to stop before being dashed against the porch of the church.

We resumed our course; we had left Martinville some little time, and the village, after accompanying us for a few seconds, had already disappeared, when, lingering alone on the horizon to watch our flight, its steeples and that of Vieuxvicq waved once again, in token of farewell, their sun-bathed pinnacles. Sometimes one would withdraw, so that the other two might watch us for a moment still; then the road changed direction, they veered in the light like three golden pivots, and vanished from my gaze. But, a little later, when we were already close to Combray, the sun having set meanwhile, I caught sight of them for the last time, far away, and seeming no more now than three flowers painted upon the sky above the low line of fields. They made me think, too, of three maidens in a legend, abandoned in a solitary place over which night had begun to fall; and while we drew away from them at a gallop, I could see them timidly seeking their way, and, after some awkward, stumbling movements of their noble silhouettes, drawing close to one another, slipping one behind another, shewing nothing more, now, against the still rosy sky than a single dusky form, charming and resigned, and so vanishing in the night.

I never thought again of this page, but at the moment when, on my corner of the box-seat, where the Doctor's coachman was in the habit of placing, in a hamper, the fowls which he had bought at Martinville market, I had finished writing it, I found such a sense of happiness, felt that it had so entirely relieved my mind of the obsession of the steeples, and of the mystery which they concealed, that, as though I myself were a hen and had just laid an egg, I began to sing at the top of my voice.

All day long, during these walks, I had been able to muse upon the pleasure that there would be in the friendship of the Duchesse de Guermantes, in fishing for trout, in drifting by myself in a boat on the Vivonne; and, greedy for happiness, I asked nothing more from life, in such moments, than that it should consist always of a series of joyous afternoons. But when, on our way home, I had caught sight of a farm, on the left of the road, at some distance from two other farms which were themselves close together, and from which, to return to Combray, we need only turn down an avenue of oaks, bordered on one side by a series of orchard-closes, each one planted at regular intervals with apple-trees which cast upon the ground, when they were lighted by the setting sun, the Japanese stencil of their shadows; then, sharply, my heart would begin to beat, I would know that in half an hour we should be at home, and that there, as was the rule on days when we had taken the 'Guermantes way' and dinner was, in consequence, served later than usual, I should be sent to bed as soon as I had swallowed my soup, so that my mother, kept at table, just as though there had been company to dinner, would not come upstairs to say good night to me in bed. The zone of melancholy which I then entered was totally distinct from that other zone, in which I had been bounding for joy a moment earlier, just as sometimes in the sky a band of pink is separated, as though by a line invisibly ruled, from a band of green or black. You may see a bird flying across the pink; it draws near the border-line, touches it, enters and is lost upon the black. The longings by which I had just now been absorbed, to go to Guermantes, to travel, to live a life of happiness—I was now so remote from them that their fulfilment would have afforded me no pleasure. How readily would I have sacrificed them all, just to be able to cry, all night long, in the arms of Mamma! Shuddering with emotion, I could not take my agonised eyes from my mother's face, which was not to appear that evening in the bedroom where I could see myself already lying, in imagination; and wished only that I were lying dead. And this state would persist until the morrow, when, the rays of morning leaning their bars of light, as the gardener might lean his ladder, against the wall overgrown with nasturtiums, which clambered up it as far as my window-sill, I would leap out of bed to run down at once into the garden, with no thought of the fact that evening must return, and with it the hour when I must leave my mother. And so it was from the 'Guermantes way' that I learned to distinguish between these states which reigned alternately in my mind, during certain periods, going so far as to divide every day between them, each one returning to dispossess the other with the regularity of a fever and ague: contiguous, and yet so foreign to one another, so devoid of means of communication, that I could no longer understand, or even picture to myself, in one state what I had desired or dreaded or even done in the other.

So the 'Méséglise way' and the 'Guermantes way' remain for me linked with many of the little incidents of that one of all the divers lives along whose parallel lines we are moved, which is the most abundant in sudden reverses of fortune, the richest in episodes; I mean the life of the mind. Doubtless it makes in us an imperceptible progress, and the truths which have changed for us its meaning and its aspect, which have opened new paths before our feet, we had for long been preparing for their discovery; but that preparation was unconscious; and for us those truths date only from the day, from the minute when they became apparent. The flowers which played then among the grass, the water which rippled past in the sunshine, the whole landscape which served as environment to their apparition lingers around the memory of them still with its unconscious or unheeding air; and, certainly, when they were slowly scrutinised by this humble passer-by, by this dreaming child—as the face of a king is scrutinised by a petitioner lost in the crowd—that scrap of nature, that corner of a garden could never suppose that it would be thanks to him that they would be elected to survive in all their most ephemeral details; and yet the scent of hawthorn which strays plundering along the hedge from which, in a little while, the dog-roses will have banished it, a sound of footsteps followed by no echo, upon a gravel path, a bubble formed at the side of a waterplant by the current, and formed only to burst—my exaltation of mind has borne them with it, and has succeeded in making them traverse all these successive years, while all around them the one-trodden ways have vanished, while those who thronged those ways, and even the memory of those who thronged those trodden ways, are dead. Sometimes the fragment of landscape thus transported into the present will detach itself in such isolation from all associations that it floats uncertainly upon my mind, like a flowering isle of Delos, and I am unable to say from what place, from what time—perhaps, quite simply, from which of my dreams—it comes. But it is pre-eminently as the deepest layer of my mental soil, as firm sites on which I still may build, that I regard the Méséglise and Guermantes 'ways.' It is because I used to think of certain things, of certain people, while I was roaming along them, that the things, the people which they taught me to know, and these alone, I still take seriously, still give me joy. Whether it be that the faith which creates has ceased to exist in me, or that reality will take shape in the memory alone, the flowers that people shew me nowadays for the first time never seem to me to be true flowers. The 'Méséglise way' with its lilacs, its hawthorns, its cornflowers, its poppies, its apple-trees, the 'Guermantes way' with its river full of tadpoles, its water-lilies, and its buttercups have constituted for me for all time the picture of the land in which I fain would pass my life, in which my only requirements are that I may go out fishing, drift idly in a boat, see the ruins of a gothic fortress in the grass, and find hidden among the cornfields—as Saint-André-des-Champs lay hidden—an old church, monumental, rustic, and yellow like a mill-stone; and the cornflowers, the hawthorns, the apple-trees which I may happen, when I go walking, to encounter in the fields, because they are situated at the same depth, on the level of my past life, at once establish contact with my heart. And yet, because there is an element of individuality in places, when I am seized with a desire to see again the 'Guermantes way,' it would not be satisfied were I led to the banks of a river in which were lilies as fair, or even fairer than those in the Vivonne, any more than on my return home in the evening, at the hour when there awakened in me that anguish which, later on in life, transfers itself to the passion of love, and may even become its inseparable companion, I should have wished for any strange mother to come in and say good night to me, though she were far more beautiful and more intelligent than my own. No: just as the one thing necessary to send me to sleep contented (in that untroubled peace which no mistress, in later years, has ever been able to give me, since one has doubts of them at the moment when one believes in them, and never can possess their hearts as I used to receive, in her kiss, the heart of my mother, complete, without scruple or reservation, unburdened by any liability save to myself) was that it should be my mother who came, that she should incline towards me that face on which there was, beneath her eye, something that was, it appears, a blemish, and which I loved as much as all the rest—so what I want to see again is the 'Guermantes way' as I knew it, with the farm that stood a little apart from the two neighbouring farms, pressed so close together, at the entrance to the oak avenue; those meadows upon whose surface, when it is polished by the sun to the mirroring radiance of a lake, are outlined the leaves of the apple-trees; that whole landscape whose individuality sometimes, at night, in my dreams, binds me with a power that is almost fantastic, of which I can discover no trace when I awake.

No doubt, by virtue of having permanently and indissolubly combined in me groups of different impressions, for no reason save that they had made me feel several separate things at the same time, the Méséglise and Guermantes 'ways' left me exposed, in later life, to much disillusionment, and even to many mistakes. For often I have wished to see a person again without realising that it was simply because that person recalled to me a hedge of hawthorns in blossom; and I have been led to believe, and to make some one else believe in an aftermath of affection, by what was no more than an inclination to travel. But by the same qualities, and by their persistence in those of my impressions, to-day, to which they can find an attachment, the two 'ways' give to those impressions a foundation, depth, a dimension lacking from the rest. They invest them, too, with a charm, a significance which is for me alone. When, on a summer evening, the resounding sky growls like a tawny lion, and everyone is complaining of the storm, it is along the 'Méséglise way' that my fancy strays alone in ecstasy, inhaling, through the noise of falling rain, the odour of invisible and persistent lilac-trees.

And so I would often lie until morning, dreaming of the old days at Combray, of my melancholy and wakeful evenings there; of other days besides, the memory of which had been more lately restored to me by the taste—by what would have been called at Combray the 'perfume'—of a cup of tea; and, by an association of memories, of a story which, many years after I had left the little place, had been told me of a love affair in which Swann had been involved before I was born; with that accuracy of detail which it is easier, often, to obtain when we are studying the lives of people who have been dead for centuries than when we are trying to chronicle those of our own most intimate friends, an accuracy which it seems as impossible to attain as it seemed impossible to speak from one town to another, before we learned of the contrivance by which that impossibility has been overcome. All these memories, following one after another, were condensed into a single substance, but had not so far coalesced that I could not discern between the three strata, between my oldest, my instinctive memories, those others, inspired more recently by a taste or 'perfume,' and those which were actually the memories of another, from whom I had acquired them at second hand—no fissures, indeed, no geological faults, but at least those veins, those streaks of colour which in certain rocks, in certain marbles, point to differences of origin, age, and formation.

It is true that, when morning drew near, I would long have settled the brief uncertainty of my waking dream, I would know in what room I was actually lying, would have reconstructed it round about me in the darkness, and—fixing my orientation by memory alone, or with the assistance of a feeble glimmer of light at the foot of which I placed the curtains and the window—would have reconstructed it complete and with its furniture, as an architect and an upholsterer might do, working upon an original, discarded plan of the doors and windows; would have replaced the mirrors and set the chest-of-drawers on its accustomed site. But scarcely had daylight itself—and no longer the gleam from a last, dying ember on a brass curtain-rod, which I had mistaken for daylight—traced across the darkness, as with a stroke of chalk across a blackboard, its first white correcting ray, when the window, with its curtains, would leave the frame of the doorway, in which I had erroneously placed it, while, to make room for it, the writing-table, which my memory had clumsily fixed where the window ought to be, would hurry off at full speed, thrusting before it the mantelpiece, and sweeping aside the wall of the passage; the well of the courtyard would be enthroned on the spot where, a moment earlier, my dressing-room had lain, and the dwelling-place which I had built up for myself in the darkness would have gone to join all those other dwellings of which I had caught glimpses from the whirlpool of awakening; put to flight by that pale sign traced above my window-curtains by the uplifted forefinger of day.

SWANN IN LOVE

To admit you to the 'little nucleus,' the 'little group,' the 'little clan' at the Verdurins', one condition sufficed, but that one was indispensable; you must give tacit adherence to a Creed one of whose articles was that the young pianist, whom Mme. Verdurin had taken under her patronage that year, and of whom she said "Really, it oughtn't to be allowed, to play Wagner as well as that!" left both Planté and Rubinstein 'sitting'; while Dr. Cottard was a more brilliant diagnostician than Potain. Each 'new recruit' whom the Verdurins failed to persuade that the evenings spent by other people, in other houses than theirs, were as dull as ditch-water, saw himself banished forthwith. Women being in this respect more rebellious than men, more reluctant to lay aside all worldly curiosity and the desire to find out for themselves whether other drawing-rooms might not sometimes be as entertaining, and the Verdurins feeling, moreover, that this critical spirit and this demon of frivolity might, by their contagion, prove fatal to the orthodoxy of the little church, they had been obliged to expel, one after another, all those of the 'faithful' who were of the female sex.

Apart from the doctor's young wife, they were reduced almost exclusively that season (for all that Mme. Verdurin herself was a thoroughly 'good' woman, and came of a respectable middle-class family, excessively rich and wholly undistinguished, with which she had gradually and of her own accord severed all connection) to a young woman almost of a 'certain class,' a Mme. de Crécy, whom Mme. Verdurin called by her Christian name, Odette, and pronounced a 'love,' and to the pianist's aunt, who looked as though she had, at one period, 'answered the bell': ladies quite ignorant of the world, who in their social simplicity were so easily led to believe that the Princesse de Sagan and the Duchesse de Guermantes were obliged to pay large sums of money to other poor wretches, in order to have anyone at their dinner-parties, that if somebody had offered to procure them an invitation to the house of either of those great dames, the old doorkeeper and the woman of 'easy virtue' would have contemptuously declined.

The Verdurins never invited you to dinner; you had your 'place laid' there. There was never any programme for the evening's entertainment. The young pianist would play, but only if he felt inclined, for no one was forced to do anything, and, as M. Verdurin used to say: "We're all friends here. Liberty Hall, you know!"

If the pianist suggested playing the Ride of the Valkyries, or the Prelude to Tristan, Mme. Verdurin would protest, not that the music was displeasing to her, but, on the contrary, that it made too violent an impression. "Then you want me to have one of my headaches? You know quite well, it's the same every time he plays that. I know what I'm in for. To-morrow, when I want to get up—nothing doing!" If he was not going to play they talked, and one of the friends—usually the painter who was in favour there that year—would "spin," as M. Verdurin put it, "a damned funny yarn that made 'em all split with laughter," and especially Mme. Verdurin, for whom—so strong was her habit of taking literally the figurative accounts of her emotions—Dr. Cottard, who was then just starting in general practice, would "really have to come one day and set her jaw, which she had dislocated with laughing too much."

Evening dress was barred, because you were all 'good pals,' and didn't want to look like the 'boring people' who were to be avoided like the plague, and only asked to the big evenings, which were given as seldom as possible, and then only if it would amuse the painter or make the musician better known. The rest of the time you were quite happy playing charades and having supper in fancy dress, and there was no need to mingle any strange element with the little 'clan.'

But just as the 'good pals' came to take a more and more prominent place in Mme. Verdurin's life, so the 'bores,' the 'nuisances' grew to include everybody and everything that kept her friends away from her, that made them sometimes plead 'previous engagements,' the mother of one, the professional duties of another, the 'little place in the country' of a third. If Dr. Cottard felt bound to say good night as soon as they rose from table, so as to go back to some patient who was seriously ill; "I don't know," Mme. Verdurin would say, "I'm sure it will do him far more good if you don't go disturbing him again this evening; he will have a good night without you; to-morrow morning you can go round early and you will find him cured." From the beginning of December it would make her quite ill to think that the 'faithful' might fail her on Christmas and New Year's Days. The pianist's aunt insisted that he must accompany her, on the latter, to a family dinner at her mother's.

"You don't suppose she'll die, your mother," exclaimed Mme. Verdurin bitterly, "if you don't have dinner with her on New Year's Day, like people in the *provinces*!"

Her uneasiness was kindled again in Holy Week: "Now you, Doctor, you're a sensible, broad-minded man; you'll come, of course, on Good Friday, just like any other day?" she said to Cottard in the first year of the little 'nucleus,' in a loud and confident voice, as though there could be no doubt of his answer. But she trembled as she waited for it, for if he did not come she might find herself condemned to dine alone.

"I shall come on Good Friday—to say good-bye to you, for we are going to spend the holidays in Auvergne."

"In Auvergne? To be eaten by fleas and all sorts of creatures! A fine lot of good that will do you!" And after a solemn pause: "If you had only told us, we would have tried to get up a party, and all gone there together, comfortably."

And so, too, if one of the 'faithful' had a friend, or one of the ladies a young man, who was liable, now and then, to make them miss an evening, the Verdurins, who were not in the least afraid of a woman's having a lover, provided that she had him in their company, loved him in their company and did not prefer him to their company, would say: "Very well, then, bring your friend along." And he would be put to the test, to see whether he was willing to have no secrets from Mme. Verdurin, whether he was susceptible of being enrolled in the 'little clan.' If he failed to pass, the faithful one who had introduced him would be taken on one side, and would be tactfully assisted to quarrel with the friend or mistress. But if the test proved satisfactory, the newcomer would in turn be numbered among the 'faithful.' And so when, in the course of this same year, the courtesan told M. Verdurin that she had made the acquaintance of such a charming gentleman, M. Swann, and hinted that he would very much like to be allowed to come, M. Verdurin carried the request at once to his wife. He never formed an opinion on any subject until she had formed hers, his special duty being to carry out her wishes and those of the 'faithful' generally, which he did with boundless ingenuity.

"My dear, Mme. de Crécy has something to say to you. She would like to bring one of her friends here, a M. Swann. What do you say?"

"Why, as if anybody could refuse anything to a little piece of perfection like that. Be quiet; no one asked your opinion. I tell you that you are a piece of perfection."

"Just as you like," replied Odette, in an affected tone, and then went on: "You know I'm not fishing for compliments."

"Very well; bring your friend, if he's nice."

Now there was no connection whatsoever between the 'little nucleus' and the society which Swann frequented, and a purely worldly man would have thought it hardly worth his while, when occupying so exceptional a position in the world, to seek an introduction to the Verdurins. But Swann was so ardent a lover that, once he had got to know almost all the women of the aristocracy, once they had taught him all that there was to learn, he had ceased to regard those naturalisation papers, almost a patent of nobility, which the Faubourg Saint-Germain had bestowed upon him, save as a sort of negotiable bond, a letter of credit with no intrinsic value, which allowed him to improvise a status for himself in some little hole in the country, or in some obscure quarter of Paris, where the good-looking daughter of a local squire or solicitor had taken his fancy. For at such times desire, or love itself, would revive in him a feeling of vanity from which he was now quite free in his everyday life, although it was, no doubt, the same feeling which had originally prompted him towards that career as a man of fashion in which he had squandered his intellectual gifts upon frivolous amusements, and had made use of his erudition in matters of art only to advise society ladies what pictures to buy and how to decorate their houses; and this vanity it was which made him eager to shine, in the sight of any fair unknown who had captivated him for the moment, with a brilliance which the name of Swann by itself did not emit. And he was most eager when the fair unknown was in humble circumstances. Just as it is not by other men of intelligence that an intelligent man is afraid of being thought a fool, so it is not by the great gentleman but by boors and 'bounders' that a man of fashion is afraid of finding his social value underrated. Three-fourths of the mental ingenuity displayed, of the social falsehoods scattered broadcast ever since the world began by people whose importance they have served only to diminish, have been aimed at inferiors. And Swann, who behaved quite simply and was at his ease when with a duchess, would tremble, for fear of being despised, and would instantly begin to pose, were he to meet her grace's maid.

Unlike so many people, who, either from lack of energy or else from a resigned sense of the obligation laid upon them by their social grandeur to remain moored like houseboats to a certain point on the bank of the stream of life, abstain from the pleasures which are offered to them above and below that point, that degree in life in which they will remain fixed until the day of their death, and are content, in the end, to describe as pleasures, for want of any better, those mediocre distractions, that just not intolerable tedium which is enclosed there with them; Swann would endeavour not to find charm and beauty in the women with whom he must pass time, but to pass his time among women whom he had already found to be beautiful and charming. And these were, as often as not, women whose beauty was of a distinctly 'common' type, for the physical qualities which attracted him instinctively, and without reason, were the direct opposite of those that he admired in the women painted or sculptured by his favourite masters. Depth of character, or a melancholy expression on a woman's face would freeze his senses, which would, however, immediately melt at the sight of healthy, abundant, rosy human flesh.

If on his travels he met a family whom it would have been more correct for him to make no attempt to know, but among whom a woman caught his eye, adorned with a special charm that was new to him, to remain on his 'high horse' and to cheat the desire that she had kindled in him, to substitute a pleasure different from that which he might have tasted in her company by writing to invite one of his former mistresses to come and join him, would have seemed to him as cowardly an abdication in the face of life, as stupid a renunciation of a new form of happiness as if, instead of visiting the country where he was, he had shut himself up in his own rooms and looked at 'views' of Paris. He did not immure himself in the solid structure of his social relations, but had made of them, so as to be able to set it up afresh upon new foundations wherever a woman might take his fancy, one of those collapsible tents which explorers carry about with them. Any part of it which was not portable or could not be adapted to some fresh pleasure he would discard as valueless, however enviable it might appear to others. How often had his credit with a duchess, built up of the yearly accumulation of her desire to do him some favour for which she had never found an opportunity, been squandered in a moment by his calling upon her, in an indiscreetly worded message, for a recommendation by telegraph which would put him in touch at once with one of her agents whose daughter he had noticed in the country, just as a starving man might barter a diamond for a crust of bread. Indeed, when it was too late, he would laugh at himself for it, for there was in his nature, redeemed by many rare refinements, an element of clownishness. Then he belonged to that class of intelligent men who have led a life of idleness, and who seek consolation and, perhaps, an excuse in the idea, which their idleness offers to their intelligence, of objects as worthy of their interest as any that could be attained by art or learning, the idea that 'Life' contains situations more interesting and more romantic than all the romances ever written. So, at least, he would assure and had no difficulty in persuading the more subtle among his friends in the fashionable world, notably the Baron de Charlus, whom he liked to amuse with stories of the startling adventures that had befallen him, such as when he had met a woman in the train, and had taken her home with him, before discovering that she was the sister of a reigning monarch, in whose hands were gathered, at that moment, all the threads of European politics, of which he found himself kept informed in the most delightful fashion, or when, in the complexity of circumstances, it depended upon the choice which the Conclave was about to make whether he might or might not become the lover of somebody's cook.

It was not only the brilliant phalanx of virtuous dowagers, generals and academicians, to whom he was bound by such close ties, that Swann compelled with so much cynicism to serve him as panders. All his friends were accustomed to receive, from time to time, letters which called on them for a word of recommendation or introduction, with a diplomatic adroitness which, persisting throughout all his successive 'affairs' and using different pretexts, revealed more glaringly than the clumsiest indiscretion, a permanent trait in his character and an unvarying quest. I used often to recall to myself when, many years later, I began to take an interest in his character because of the similarities which, in wholly different respects, it offered to my own, how, when he used to write to my grandfather (though not at the time we are now considering, for it was about the date of my own birth that Swann's great 'affair' began, and made a long interruption in his amatory practices) the latter, recognising his friend's handwriting on the envelope, would exclaim: "Here is Swann asking for something; on guard!" And, either from distrust or from the unconscious spirit of devilry which urges us to offer a thing only to those who do not want it, my grandparents would meet with an obstinate refusal the most easily satisfied of his prayers, as when he begged them for an introduction to a girl who dined with us every Sunday, and whom they were obliged, whenever Swann mentioned her, to pretend that they no longer saw, although they would be wondering, all through the week, whom they could invite to meet her, and often failed, in the end, to find anyone, sooner than make a sign to him who would so gladly have accepted.

Occasionally a couple of my grandparents' acquaintance, who had been complaining for some time that they never saw Swann now, would announce with satisfaction, and perhaps with a slight inclination to make my grandparents envious of them, that he had suddenly become as charming as he could possibly be, and was never out of their house. My grandfather would not care to shatter their pleasant illusion, but would look at my grandmother, as he hummed the air of:

What is this mystery?
I cannot understand it;

or of:

Vision fugitive . . . ;
In matters such as this
'Tis best to close one's eyes.

A few months later, if my grandfather asked Swann's new friend "What about Swann? Do you still see as much of him as ever?" the other's face would lengthen: "Never mention his name to me again!"

"But I thought that you were such friends . . ."

He had been intimate in this way for several months with some cousins of my grandmother, dining almost every evening at their house. Suddenly, and without any warning, he ceased to appear. They supposed him to be ill, and the lady of the house was going to send to inquire for him when, in her kitchen, she found a letter in his hand, which her cook had left by accident in the housekeeping book. In this he announced that he was leaving Paris and would not be able to come to the house again. The cook had been his mistress, and at the moment of breaking off relations she was the only one of the household whom he had thought it necessary to inform.

But when his mistress for the time being was a woman in society, or at least one whose birth was not so lowly, nor her position so irregular that he was unable to arrange for her reception in 'society,' then for her sake he would return to it, but only to the particular orbit in which she moved or into which he had drawn her. "No good depending on Swann for this evening," people would say; "don't you remember, it's his American's night at the Opera?" He would secure invitations for her to the most exclusive drawing-rooms, to those houses where he himself went regularly, for weekly dinners or for poker; every evening, after a slight 'wave' imparted to his stiffly brushed red locks had tempered with a certain softness the ardour of his bold green eyes, he would select a flower for his buttonhole and set out to meet his mistress at the house of one or other of the women of his circle; and then, thinking of the affection and admiration which the fashionable folk, whom he always treated exactly as he pleased, would, when he met them there, lavish upon him in the presence of the woman whom he loved, he would find a fresh charm in that worldly existence of which he had grown weary, but whose substance, pervaded and warmly coloured by the flickering light which he had slipped into its midst, seemed to him beautiful and rare, now that he had incorporated in it a fresh love.

But while each of these attachments, each of these flirtations had been the realisation, more or less complete, of a dream born of the sight of a face or a form which Swann had spontaneously, and without effort on his part, found charming, it was quite another matter when, one day at the theatre, he was introduced to Odette de Crécy by an old friend of his own, who had spoken of her to him as a ravishing creature with whom he might very possibly come to an understanding; but had made her out to be harder of conquest than she actually was, so as to appear to be conferring a special favour by the introduction. She had struck Swann not, certainly, as being devoid of beauty, but as endowed with a style of beauty which left him indifferent, which aroused in him no desire, which gave him, indeed, a sort of physical repulsion; as one of those women of whom every man can name some, and each will name different examples, who are the converse of the type which our senses demand. To give him any pleasure her profile was too sharp, her skin too delicate, her cheek-bones too prominent, her features too tightly drawn. Her eyes were fine, but so large that they seemed to be bending beneath their own weight, strained the rest of her face and always made her appear unwell or in an ill humour. Some time after this introduction at the theatre she had written to ask Swann whether she might see his collections, which would interest her so much, she, "an ignorant woman with a taste for beautiful things," saying that she would know him better when once she had seen him in his 'home,' where she imagined him to be "so comfortable with his tea and his books"; although she had not concealed her surprise at his being in that part of the town, which must be so depressing, and was "not nearly smart enough for such a very smart man." And when he allowed her to come she had said to him as she left how sorry she was to have stayed so short a time in a house into which she was so glad to have found her way at last, speaking of him as though he had meant something more to her than the rest of the people she knew, and appearing to unite their two selves with a kind of romantic bond which had made him smile. But at the time of life, tinged already with disenchantment, which Swann was approaching, when a man can content himself with being in love for the pleasure of loving without expecting too much in return, this linking of hearts, if it is no longer, as in early youth, the goal towards which love, of necessity, tends, still is bound to love by so strong an association of ideas that it may well become the cause of love if it presents itself first. In his younger days a man dreams of possessing the heart of the woman whom he loves; later, the feeling that he possesses the heart of a woman may be enough to make him fall in love with her. And so, at an age when it would appear—since one seeks in love before everything else a subjective pleasure—that the taste for feminine beauty must play the larger part in its procreation, love may come into being, love of the most physical order, without any foundation in desire. At this time of life a man has already been wounded more than once by the darts of love; it no longer evolves by itself, obeying its own incomprehensible and fatal laws, before his passive and astonished heart. We come to its aid; we falsify it by memory and by suggestion; recognising one of its symptoms we recall and recreate the rest. Since we possess its hymn, engraved on our hearts in its entirety, there is no need of any woman to repeat the opening lines, potent with the admiration which her beauty inspires, for us to remember all that follows. And if she begin in the middle, where it sings of our existing, henceforward, for one another only, we are well enough attuned to that music to be able to take it up and follow our partner, without hesitation, at the first pause in her voice.

Odette de Crécy came again to see Swann; her visits grew more frequent, and doubtless each visit revived the sense of disappointment which he felt at the sight of a face whose details he had somewhat forgotten in the interval, not remembering it as either so expressive or, in spite of her youth, so faded; he used to regret, while she was talking to him, that her really considerable beauty was not of the kind which he spontaneously admired. It must be remarked that Odette's face appeared thinner and more prominent than it actually was, because her forehead and the upper part of her cheeks, a single and almost plane surface, were covered by the masses of hair which women wore at that period, drawn forward in a fringe, raised in crimped waves and falling in stray locks over her ears; while as for her figure, and she was admirably built, it was impossible to make out its continuity (on account of the fashion then prevailing, and in spite of her being one of the best-dressed women in Paris) for the corset, jetting forwards in an arch, as though over an imaginary stomach, and ending in a sharp point, beneath which bulged out the balloon of her double skirts, gave a woman, that year, the appearance of being composed of different sections badly fitted together; to such an extent did the frills, the flounces, the inner bodice follow, in complete independence, controlled only by the fancy of their designer or the rigidity of their material, the line which led them to the knots of ribbon, falls of lace, fringes of vertically hanging jet, or carried them along the bust, but nowhere attached themselves to the living creature, who, according as the architecture of their fripperies drew them towards or away from her own, found herself either strait-laced to suffocation or else completely buried.

But, after Odette had left him, Swann would think with a smile of her telling him how the time would drag until he allowed her to come again; he remembered the anxious, timid way in which she had once begged him that it might not be very long, and the way in which she had looked at him then, fixing upon him her fearful and imploring gaze, which gave her a touching air beneath the bunches of artificial pansies fastened in the front of her round bonnet of white straw, tied with strings of black velvet. "And won't you," she had ventured, "come just once and take tea with me?" He had pleaded pressure of work, an essay—which, in reality, he had abandoned years ago—on Vermeer of Delft. "I know that I am quite useless," she had replied, "a little wild thing like me beside a learned great man like you. I should be like the frog in the fable! And yet I should so much like to learn, to know things, to be initiated. What fun it would be to become a regular bookworm, to bury my nose in a lot of old papers!" she had gone on, with that self-satisfied air which a smart woman adopts when she insists that her one desire is to give herself up, without fear of soiling her fingers, to some unclean task, such as cooking the dinner, with her "hands right in the dish itself." "You will only laugh at me, but this painter who stops you from seeing me," she meant Vermeer, "I have never even heard of him; is he alive still? Can I see any of his things in Paris, so as to have some idea of what is going on behind that great brow which works so hard, that head which I feel sure is always puzzling away about things; just to be able to say 'There, that's what he's thinking about!' What a dream it would be to be able to help you with your work."

He had sought an excuse in his fear of forming new friendships, which he gallantly described as his fear of a hopeless passion. "You are afraid of falling in love? How funny that is, when I go about seeking nothing else, and would give my soul just to find a little love somewhere!" she had said, so naturally and with such an air of conviction that he had been genuinely touched. "Some woman must have made you suffer. And you think that the rest are all like her. She can't have understood you: you are so utterly different from ordinary men. That's what I liked about you when I first saw you; I felt at once that you weren't like everybody else."

"And then, besides, there's yourself——" he had continued, "I know what women are; you must have a whole heap of things to do, and never any time to spare."

"I? Why, I have never anything to do. I am always free, and I always will be free if you want me. At whatever hour of the day or night it may suit you to see me, just send for me, and I shall be only too delighted to come. Will you do that? Do you know what I should really like—to introduce you to Mme. Verdurin, where I go every evening. Just fancy my finding you there, and thinking that it was a little for my sake that you had gone."

No doubt, in thus remembering their conversations, in thinking about her thus when he was alone, he did no more than call her image into being among those of countless other women in his romantic dreams; but if, thanks to some accidental circumstance (or even perhaps without that assistance, for the circumstance which presents itself at the moment when a mental state, hitherto latent, makes itself felt, may well have had no influence whatsoever upon that state), the image of Odette de Crécy came to absorb the whole of his dreams, if from those dreams the memory of her could no longer be eliminated, then her bodily imperfections would no longer be of the least importance, nor would the conformity of her body, more or less than any other, to the requirements of Swann's taste; since, having become the body of her whom he loved, it must henceforth be the only one capable of causing him joy or anguish.

It so happened that my grandfather had known—which was more than could be said of any other actual acquaintance—the family of these Verdurins. But he had entirely severed his connection with what he called "young Verdurin," taking a general view of him as one who had fallen—though without losing hold of his millions—among the riff-raff of Bohemia. One day he received a letter from Swann asking whether my grandfather could put him in touch with the Verdurins. "On guard! on guard!" he exclaimed as he read it, "I am not at all surprised; Swann was bound to finish up like this. A nice lot of people! I cannot do what he asks, because, in the first place, I no longer know the gentleman in question. Besides, there must be a woman in it somewhere, and I don't mix myself up in such matters. Ah, well, we shall see some fun if Swann begins running after the little Verdurins."

And on my grandfather's refusal to act as sponsor, it was Odette herself who had taken Swann to the house.

The Verdurins had had dining with them, on the day when Swann made his first appearance, Dr. and Mme. Cottard, the young pianist and his aunt, and the painter then in favour, while these were joined, in the course of the evening, by several more of the 'faithful.'

Dr. Cottard was never quite certain of the tone in which he ought to reply to any observation, or whether the speaker was jesting or in earnest. And so in any event he would embellish all his facial expressions with the offer of a conditional, a provisional smile whose expectant subtlety would exonerate him from the charge of being a simpleton, if the remark addressed to him should turn out to have been facetious. But as he must also be prepared to face the alternative, he never dared to allow this smile a definite expression on his features, and you would see there a perpetually flickering uncertainty, in which you might decipher the question that he never dared to ask: "Do you really mean that?" He was no more confident of the manner in which he ought to conduct himself in the street, or indeed in life generally, than he was in a drawing-room; and he might be seen greeting passers-by, carriages, and anything that occurred with a malicious smile which absolved his subsequent behaviour of all impropriety, since it proved, if it should turn out unsuited to the occasion, that he was well aware of that, and that if he had assumed a smile, the jest was a secret of his own.

On all those points, however, where a plain question appeared to him to be permissible, the Doctor was unsparing in his endeavours to cultivate the wilderness of his ignorance and uncertainty and so to complete his education.

So it was that, following the advice given him by a wise mother on his first coming up to the capital from his provincial home, he would never let pass either a figure of speech or a proper name that was new to him without an effort to secure the fullest information upon it.

As regards figures of speech, he was insatiable in his thirst for knowledge, for often imagining them to have a more definite meaning than was actually the case, he would want to know what, exactly, was intended by those which he most frequently heard used: 'devilish pretty,' 'blue blood,' 'a cat and dog life,' 'a day of reckoning,' 'a queen of fashion,' 'to give a free hand,' 'to be at a deadlock,' and so forth; and in what particular circumstances he himself might make use of them in conversation. Failing these, he would adorn it with puns and other 'plays upon words' which he had learned by rote. As for the names of strangers which were uttered in his hearing, he used merely to repeat them to himself in a questioning tone, which, he thought, would suffice to furnish him with explanations for which he would not ostensibly seek.

As the critical faculty, on the universal application of which he prided himself, was, in reality, completely lacking, that refinement of good breeding which consists in assuring some one whom you are obliging in any way, without expecting to be believed, that it is really yourself that is obliged to him, was wasted on Cottard, who took everything that he heard in its literal sense. However blind she may have been to his faults, Mme. Verdurin was genuinely annoyed, though she still continued to regard him as brilliantly clever, when, after she had invited him to see and hear Sarah Bernhardt from a stage box, and had said politely: "It is very good of you to have come, Doctor, especially as I'm sure you must often have heard Sarah Bernhardt; and besides, I'm afraid we're rather too near the stage," the Doctor, who had come into the box with a smile which waited before settling upon or vanishing from his face until some one in authority should enlighten him as to the merits of the spectacle, replied: "To be sure, we are far too near the stage, and one is getting sick of Sarah Bernhardt. But you expressed a wish that I should come. For me, your wish is a command. I am only too glad to be able to do you this little service. What would one not do to please you, you are so good." And he went on, "Sarah Bernhardt; that's what they call the Voice of God, ain't it? You see, often, too, that she 'sets the boards on fire.' That's an odd expression, ain't it?" in the hope of an enlightening commentary, which, however, was not forthcoming.

"D'you know," Mme. Verdurin had said to her husband, "I believe we are going the wrong way to work when we depreciate anything we offer the Doctor. He is a scientist who lives quite apart from our everyday existence; he knows nothing himself of what things are worth, and he accepts everything that we say as gospel."

"I never dared to mention it," M. Verdurin had answered, "but I've noticed the same thing myself." And on the following New Year's Day, instead of sending Dr. Cottard a ruby that cost three thousand francs, and pretending that it was a mere trifle, M. Verdurin bought an artificial stone for three hundred, and let it be understood that it was something almost impossible to match.

When Mme. Verdurin had announced that they were to see M. Swann that evening; "Swann!" the Doctor had exclaimed in a tone rendered brutal by his astonishment, for the smallest piece of news would always take utterly unawares this man who imagined himself to be perpetually in readiness for anything. And seeing that no one answered him, "Swann! Who on earth is Swann?" he shouted, in a frenzy of anxiety which subsided as soon as Mme. Verdurin had explained, "Why, Odette's friend, whom she told us about."

"Ah, good, good; that's all right, then," answered the Doctor, at once mollified. As for the painter, he was overjoyed at the prospect of Swann's appearing at the Verdurins', because he supposed him to be in love with Odette, and was always ready to assist at lovers' meetings. "Nothing amuses me more than match-making," he confided to Cottard; "I have been tremendously successful, even with women!"

In telling the Verdurins that Swann was extremely 'smart,' Odette had alarmed them with the prospect of another 'bore.' When he arrived, however, he made an excellent impression, an indirect cause of which, though they did not know it, was his familiarity with the best society. He had, indeed, one of those advantages which men who have lived and moved in the world enjoy over others, even men of intelligence and refinement, who have never gone into society, namely that they no longer see it transfigured by the longing or repulsion with which it fills the imagination, but regard it as quite unimportant. Their good nature, freed from all taint of snobbishness and from the fear of seeming too friendly, grown independent, in fact, has the ease, the grace of movement of a trained gymnast each of whose supple limbs will carry out precisely the movement that is required without any clumsy participation by the rest of his body. The simple and elementary gestures used by a man of the world when he courteously holds out his hand to the unknown youth who is being introduced to him, and when he bows discreetly before the Ambassador to whom he is being introduced, had gradually pervaded, without his being conscious of it, the whole of Swann's social deportment, so that in the company of people of a lower grade than his own, such as the Verdurins and their friends, he instinctively shewed an assiduity, and made overtures with which, by their account, any of their 'bores' would have dispensed. He chilled, though for a moment only, on meeting Dr. Cottard; for seeing him close one eye with an ambiguous smile, before they had yet spoken to one another (a grimace which Cottard styled "letting 'em all come"), Swann supposed that the Doctor recognised him from having met him already somewhere, probably in some house of 'ill-fame,' though these he himself very rarely visited, never having made a habit of indulging in the mercenary sort of love. Regarding such an allusion as in bad taste, especially before Odette, whose opinion of himself it might easily alter for the worse, Swann assumed his most icy manner. But when he learned that the lady next to the Doctor was Mme. Cottard, he decided that so young a husband would not deliberately, in his wife's hearing, have made any allusion to amusements of that order, and so ceased to interpret the Doctor's expression in the sense which he had at first suspected. The painter at once invited Swann to visit his studio with Odette, and Swann found him very pleasant. "Perhaps you will be more highly favoured than I have been," Mme. Verdurin broke in, with mock resentment of the favour, "perhaps you will be allowed to see Cottard's portrait" (for which she had given the painter a commission). "Take care, Master Biche," she reminded the painter, whom it was a time-honoured pleasantry to address as 'Master,' "to catch that nice look in his eyes, that witty little twinkle. You know, what I want to have most of all is his smile; that's what I've asked you to paint—the portrait of his smile." And since the phrase struck her as noteworthy, she repeated it very loud, so as to make sure that as many as possible of her guests should hear it, and even made use of some indefinite pretext to draw the circle closer before she uttered it again. Swann begged to be introduced to everyone, even to an old friend of the Verdurins, called Saniette, whose shyness, simplicity and good-nature had deprived him of all the consideration due to his skill in palaeography, his large fortune, and the distinguished family to which he belonged. When he spoke, his words came with a confusion which was delightful to hear because one felt that it indicated not so much a defect in his speech as a quality of his soul, as it were a survival from the age of innocence which he had never wholly outgrown. All the consonants which he did not manage to pronounce seemed like harsh utterances of which his gentle lips were incapable. By asking to be made known to M. Saniette, Swann made M. Verdurin reverse the usual form of introduction (saying, in fact, with emphasis on the distinction: "M. Swann, pray let me present to you our friend Saniette") but he aroused in Saniette himself a warmth of gratitude, which, however, the Verdurins never disclosed to Swann, since Saniette rather annoyed them, and they did not feel bound to provide him with friends. On the other hand the Verdurins were extremely touched by Swann's next request, for he felt that he must ask to be introduced to the pianist's aunt. She wore a black dress, as was her invariable custom, for she believed that a woman always looked well in black, and that nothing could be more distinguished; but her face was exceedingly red, as it always was for some time after a meal. She bowed to Swann with deference, but drew herself up again with great dignity. As she was entirely uneducated, and was afraid of making mistakes in grammar and pronunciation, she used purposely to speak in an indistinct and garbling manner, thinking that if she should make a slip it would be so buried in the surrounding confusion that no one could be certain whether she had actually made it or not; with the result that her talk was a sort of continuous, blurred expectoration, out of which would emerge, at rare intervals, those sounds and syllables of which she felt positive. Swann supposed himself entitled to poke a little mild fun at her in conversation with M. Verdurin, who, however, was not at all amused.

"She is such an excellent woman!" he rejoined. "I grant you that she is not exactly brilliant; but I assure you that she can talk most charmingly when you are alone with her."

"I am sure she can," Swann hastened to conciliate him. "All I meant was that she hardly struck me as 'distinguished,' " he went on, isolating the epithet in the inverted commas of his tone, "and, after all, that is something of a compliment."

"Wait a moment," said M. Verdurin, "now, this will surprise you; she writes quite delightfully. You have never heard her nephew play? It is admirable; eh, Doctor? Would you like me to ask him to play something, M. Swann?"

"I should count myself most fortunate . . ." Swann was beginning, a trifle pompously, when the Doctor broke in derisively. Having once heard it said, and never having forgotten that in general conversation emphasis and the use of formal expressions were out of date, whenever he heard a solemn word used seriously, as the word 'fortunate' had been used just now by Swann, he at once assumed that the speaker was being deliberately pedantic. And if, moreover, the same word happened to occur, also, in what he called an old 'tag' or 'saw,' however common it might still be in current usage, the Doctor jumped to the conclusion that the whole thing was a joke, and interrupted with the remaining words of the quotation, which he seemed to charge the speaker with having intended to introduce at that point, although in reality it had never entered his mind.

"Most fortunate for France!" he recited wickedly, shooting up both arms with great vigour. M. Verdurin could not help laughing.

"What are all those good people laughing at over there? There's no sign of brooding melancholy down in your corner," shouted Mme. Verdurin. "You don't suppose I find it very amusing to be stuck up here by myself on the stool of repentance," she went on peevishly, like a spoiled child.

Mme. Verdurin was sitting upon a high Swedish chair of waxed pinewood, which a violinist from that country had given her, and which she kept in her drawing-room, although in appearance it suggested a school 'form,' and 'swore,' as the saying is, at the really good antique furniture which she had besides; but she made a point of keeping on view the presents which her 'faithful' were in the habit of making her from time to time, so that the donors might have the pleasure of seeing them there when they came to the house. She tried to persuade them to confine their tributes to flowers and sweets, which had at least the merit of mortality; but she was never successful, and the house was gradually filled with a collection of foot-warmers, cushions, clocks, screens, barometers and vases, a constant repetition and a boundless incongruity of useless but indestructible objects.

From this lofty perch she would take her spirited part in the conversation of the 'faithful,' and would revel in all their fun; but, since the accident to her jaw, she had abandoned the effort involved in real hilarity, and had substituted a kind of symbolical dumb-show which signified, without endangering or even fatiguing her in any way, that she was 'laughing until she cried.' At the least witticism aimed by any of the circle against a 'bore,' or against a former member of the circle who was now relegated to the limbo of 'bores'—and to the utter despair of M. Verdurin, who had always made out that he was just as easily amused as his wife, but who, since his laughter was the 'real thing,' was out of breath in a moment, and so was overtaken and vanquished by her device of a feigned but continuous hilarity—she would utter a shrill cry, shut tight her little bird-like eyes, which were beginning to be clouded over by a cataract, and quickly, as though she had only just time to avoid some indecent sight or to parry a mortal blow, burying her face in her hands, which completely engulfed it, and prevented her from seeing anything at all, she would appear to be struggling to suppress, to eradicate a laugh which, were she to give way to it, must inevitably leave her inanimate. So, stupefied with the gaiety of the 'faithful,' drunken with comradeship, scandal and asseveration, Mme. Verdurin, perched on her high seat like a cage-bird whose biscuit has been steeped in mulled wine, would sit aloft and sob with fellow-feeling.

Meanwhile M. Verdurin, after first asking Swann's permission to light his pipe ("No ceremony here, you understand; we're all pals!"), went and begged the young musician to sit down at the piano.

"Leave him alone; don't bother him; he hasn't come here to be tormented," cried Mme. Verdurin. "I won't have him tormented."

"But why on earth should it bother him?" rejoined M. Verdurin. "I'm sure M. Swann has never heard the sonata in F sharp which we discovered; he is going to play us the pianoforte arrangement."

"No, no, no, not my sonata!" she screamed, "I don't want to be made to cry until I get a cold in the head, and neuralgia all down my face, like last time; thanks very much, I don't intend to repeat that performance; you are all very kind and considerate; it is easy to see that none of you will have to stay in bed for a week."

This little scene, which was re-enacted as often as the young pianist sat down to play, never failed to delight the audience, as though each of them were witnessing it for the first time, as a proof of the seductive originality of the 'Mistress' as she was styled, and of the acute sensitiveness of her musical 'ear.' Those nearest to her would attract the attention of the rest, who were smoking or playing cards at the other end of the room, by their cries of 'Hear, hear!' which, as in Parliamentary debates, shewed that something worth listening to was being said. And next day they would commiserate with those who had been prevented from coming that evening, and would assure them that the 'little scene' had never been so amusingly done.

"Well, all right, then," said M. Verdurin, "he can play just the *andante*."

"Just the *andante!* How you do go on," cried his wife. "As if it weren't 'just the *andante*' that breaks every bone in my body. The 'Master' is really too priceless! Just as though, 'in the Ninth,' he said 'we need only have the *finale*,' or 'just the overture' of the *Meistersinger*."

The Doctor, however, urged Mme. Verdurin to let the pianist play, not because he supposed her to be malingering when she spoke of the distressing effects that music always had upon her, for he recognised the existence of certain neurasthenic states—but from his habit, common to many doctors, of at once relaxing the strict letter of a prescription as soon as it appeared to jeopardise, what seemed to him far more important, the success of some social gathering at which he was present, and of which the patient whom he had urged for once to forget her dyspepsia or headache formed an essential factor.

"You won't be ill this time, you'll find," he told her, seeking at the same time to subdue her mind by the magnetism of his gaze. "And, if you are ill, we will cure you."

"Will you, really?" Mme. Verdurin spoke as though, with so great a favour in store for her, there was nothing for it but to capitulate. Perhaps, too, by dint of saying that she was going to be ill, she had worked herself into a state in which she forgot, occasionally, that it was all only a 'little scene,' and regarded things, quite sincerely, from an invalid's point of view. For it may often be remarked that invalids grow weary of having the frequency of their attacks depend always on their own prudence in avoiding them, and like to let themselves think that they are free to do everything that they most enjoy doing, although they are always ill after doing it, provided only that they place themselves in the hands of a higher authority which, without putting them to the least inconvenience, can and will, by uttering a word or by administering a tabloid, set them once again upon their feet.

Odette had gone to sit on a tapestry-covered sofa near the piano, saying to Mme. Verdurin, "I have my own little corner, haven't I?"

And Mme. Verdurin, seeing Swann by himself upon a chair, made him get up. "You're not at all comfortable there; go along and sit by Odette; you can make room for M. Swann there, can't you, Odette?"

"What charming Beauvais!" said Swann, stopping to admire the sofa before he sat down on it, and wishing to be polite.

"I am glad you appreciate my sofa," replied Mme. Verdurin, "and I warn you that if you expect ever to see another like it you may as well abandon the idea at once. They never made any more like it. And these little chairs, too, are perfect marvels. You can look at them in a moment. The emblems in each of the bronze mouldings correspond to the subject of the tapestry on the chair; you know, you combine amusement with instruction when you look at them;—I can promise you a delightful time, I assure you. Just look at the little border around the edges; here, look, the little vine on a red background in this one, the Bear and the Grapes. Isn't it well drawn? What do you say? I think they knew a thing or two about design! Doesn't it make your mouth water, this vine? My husband makes out that I am not fond of fruit, because I eat less than he does. But not a bit of it, I am greedier than any of you, but I have no need to fill my mouth with them when I can feed on them with my eyes. What are you all laughing at now, pray? Ask the Doctor; he will tell you that those grapes act on me like a regular purge. Some people go to Fontainebleau for cures; I take my own little Beauvais cure here. But, M. Swann, you mustn't run away without feeling the little bronze mouldings on the backs. Isn't it an exquisite surface? No, no, not with your whole hand like that; feel them properly!"

"If Mme. Verdurin is going to start playing about with her bronzes," said the painter, "we shan't get any music to-night."

"Be quiet, you wretch! And yet we poor women," she went on, "are forbidden pleasures far less voluptuous than this. There is no flesh in the world as soft as these. None. When M. Verdurin did me the honour of being madly jealous . . . come, you might at least be polite. Don't say that you never have been jealous!"

"But, my dear, I have said absolutely nothing. Look here, Doctor, I call you as a witness; did I utter a word?"

Swann had begun, out of politeness, to finger the bronzes, and did not like to stop.

"Come along; you can caress them later; now it is you that are going to be caressed, caressed in the ear; you'll like that, I think. Here's the young gentleman who will take charge of that."

After the pianist had played, Swann felt and shewed more interest in him than in any of the other guests, for the following reason:

The year before, at an evening party, he had heard a piece of music played on the piano and violin. At first he had appreciated only the material quality of the sounds which those instruments secreted. And it had been a source of keen pleasure when, below the narrow ribbon of the violin-part, delicate, unyielding, substantial and governing the whole, he had suddenly perceived, where it was trying to surge upwards in a flowing tide of sound, the mass of the piano-part, multiform, coherent, level, and breaking everywhere in melody like the deep blue tumult of the sea, silvered and charmed into a minor key by the moonlight. But at a given moment, without being able to distinguish any clear outline, or to give a name to what was pleasing him, suddenly enraptured, he had tried to collect, to treasure in his memory the phrase or harmony—he knew not which—that had just been played, and had opened and expanded his soul, just as the fragrance of certain roses, wafted upon the moist air of evening, has the power of dilating our nostrils. Perhaps it was owing to his own ignorance of music that he had been able to receive so confused an impression, one of those that are, notwithstanding, our only purely musical impressions, limited in their extent, entirely original, and irreducible into any other kind. An impression of this order, vanishing in an instant, is, so to speak, an impression *sine materia*. Presumably the notes which we hear at such moments tend to spread out before our eyes, over surfaces greater or smaller according to their pitch and volume; to trace arabesque designs, to give us the sensation of breath or tenuity, stability or caprice. But the notes themselves have vanished before these sensations have developed sufficiently to escape submersion under those which the following, or even simultaneous notes have already begun to awaken in us. And this indefinite perception would continue to smother in its molten liquidity the *motifs* which now and then emerge, barely discernible, to plunge again and disappear and drown; recognised only by the particular kind of pleasure which they instil, impossible to describe, to recollect, to name; ineffable;—if our memory, like a labourer who toils at the laying down of firm foundations beneath the tumult of the waves, did not, by fashioning for us facsimiles of those fugitive phrases, enable us to compare and to contrast them with those that follow. And so, hardly had the delicious sensation, which Swann had experienced, died away, before his memory had furnished him with an immediate transcript, summary, it is true, and provisional, but one on which he had kept his eyes fixed while the playing continued, so effectively that, when the same impression suddenly returned, it was no longer uncapturable. He was able to picture to himself its extent, its symmetrical arrangement, its notation, the strength of its expression; he had before him that definite object which was no longer pure music, but rather design, architecture, thought, and which allowed the actual music to be recalled. This time he had distinguished, quite clearly, a phrase which emerged for a few moments from the waves of sound. It had at once held out to him an invitation to partake of intimate pleasures, of whose existence, before hearing it, he had never dreamed, into which he felt that nothing but this phrase could initiate him; and he had been filled with love for it, as with a new and strange desire.

With a slow and rhythmical movement it led him here, there, everywhere, towards a state of happiness noble, unintelligible, yet clearly indicated. And then, suddenly having reached a certain point from which he was prepared to follow it, after pausing for a moment, abruptly it changed its direction, and in a fresh movement, more rapid, multiform, melancholy, incessant, sweet, it bore him off with it towards a vista of joys unknown. Then it vanished. He hoped, with a passionate longing, that he might find it again, a third time. And reappear it did, though without speaking to him more clearly, bringing him, indeed, a pleasure less profound. But when he was once more at home he needed it, he was like a man into whose life a woman, whom he has seen for a moment passing by, has brought a new form of beauty, which strengthens and enlarges his own power of perception, without his knowing even whether he is ever to see her again whom he loves already, although he knows nothing of her, not even her name.

Indeed this passion for a phrase of music seemed, in the first few months, to be bringing into Swann's life the possibility of a sort of rejuvenation. He had so long since ceased to direct his course towards any ideal goal, and had confined himself to the pursuit of ephemeral satisfactions, that he had come to believe, though without ever formally stating his belief even to himself, that he would remain all his life in that condition, which death alone could alter. More than this, since his mind no longer entertained any lofty ideals, he had ceased to believe in (although he could not have expressly denied) their reality. He had grown also into the habit of taking refuge in trivial considerations, which allowed him to set on one side matters of fundamental importance. Just as he had never stopped to ask himself whether he would not have done better by not going into society, knowing very well that if he had accepted an invitation he must put in an appearance, and that afterwards, if he did not actually call, he must at least leave cards upon his hostess; so in his conversation he took care never to express with any warmth a personal opinion about a thing, but instead would supply facts and details which had a value of a sort in themselves, and excused him from shewing how much he really knew. He would be extremely precise about the recipe for a dish, the dates of a painter's birth and death, and the titles of his works. Sometimes, in spite of himself, he would let himself go so far as to utter a criticism of a work of art, or of some one's interpretation of life, but then he would cloak his words in a tone of irony, as though he did not altogether associate himself with what he was saying. But now, like a confirmed invalid whom, all of a sudden, a change of air and surroundings, or a new course of treatment, or, as sometimes happens, an organic change in himself, spontaneous and unaccountable, seems to have so far recovered from his malady that he begins to envisage the possibility, hitherto beyond all hope, of starting to lead—and better late than never—a wholly different life, Swann found in himself, in the memory of the phrase that he had heard, in certain other sonatas which he had made people play over to him, to see whether he might not, perhaps, discover his phrase among them, the presence of one of those invisible realities in which he had ceased to believe, but to which, as though the music had had upon the moral barrenness from which he was suffering a sort of recreative influence, he was conscious once again of a desire, almost, indeed, of the power to consecrate his life. But, never having managed to find out whose work it was that he had heard played that evening, he had been unable to procure a copy, and finally had forgotten the quest. He had indeed, in the course of the next few days, encountered several of the people who had been at the party with him, and had questioned them; but most of them had either arrived after or left before the piece was played; some had indeed been in the house, but had gone into another room to talk, and those who had stayed to listen had no clearer impression than the rest. As for his hosts, they knew that it was a recently published work which the musicians whom they had engaged for the evening had asked to be allowed to play; but, as these last were now on tour somewhere, Swann could learn nothing further. He had, of course, a number of musical friends, but, vividly as he could recall the exquisite and inexpressible pleasure which the little phrase had given him, and could see, still, before his eyes the forms that it had traced in outline, he was quite incapable of humming over to them the air. And so, at last, he ceased to think of it.

But to-night, at Mme. Verdurin's, scarcely had the little pianist begun to play when, suddenly, after a high note held on through two whole bars, Swann saw it approaching, stealing forth from underneath that resonance, which was prolonged and stretched out over it, like a curtain of sound, to veil the mystery of its birth—and recognised, secret, whispering, articulate, the airy and fragrant phrase that he had loved. And it was so peculiarly itself, it had so personal a charm, which nothing else could have replaced, that Swann felt as though he had met, in a friend's drawing-room, a woman whom he had seen and admired, once, in the street, and had despaired of ever seeing her again. Finally the phrase withdrew and vanished, pointing, directing, diligent among the wandering currents of its fragrance, leaving upon Swann's features a reflection of its smile. But now, at last, he could ask the name of his fair unknown (and was told that it was the *andante* movement of Vinteuil's sonata for the piano and violin), he held it safe, could have it again to himself, at home, as often as he would, could study its language and acquire its secret.

And so, when the pianist had finished, Swann crossed the room and thanked him with a vivacity which delighted Mme. Verdurin.

"Isn't he charming?" she asked Swann, "doesn't he just understand it, his sonata, the little wretch? You never dreamed, did you, that a piano could be made to express all that? Upon my word, there's everything in it except the piano! I'm caught out every time I hear it; I think I'm listening to an orchestra. Though it's better, really, than an orchestra, more complete."

The young pianist bent over her as he answered, smiling and underlining each of his words as though he were making an epigram: "You are most generous to me."

And while Mme. Verdurin was saying to her husband, "Run and fetch him a glass of orangeade; it's well earned!" Swann began to tell Odette how he had fallen in love with that little phrase. When their hostess, who was a little way off, called out, "Well! It looks to me as though some one was saying nice things to you, Odette!" she replied, "Yes, very nice," and he found her simplicity delightful. Then he asked for some information about this Vinteuil; what else he had done, and at what period in his life he had composed the sonata;—what meaning the little phrase could have had for him, that was what Swann wanted most to know.

But none of these people who professed to admire this musician (when Swann had said that the sonata was really charming Mme. Verdurin had exclaimed, "I quite believe it! Charming, indeed! But you don't dare to confess that you don't know Vinteuil's sonata; you have no right not to know it!"—and the painter had gone on with, "Ah, yes, it's a very fine bit of work, isn't it? Not, of course, if you want something 'obvious,' something 'popular,' but, I mean to say, it makes a very great impression on us artists."), none of them seemed ever to have asked himself these questions, for none of them was able to reply.

Even to one or two particular remarks made by Swann on his favourite phrase, "D'you know, that's a funny thing; I had never noticed it; I may as well tell you that I don't much care about peering at things through a microscope, and pricking myself on pin-points of difference; no; we don't waste time splitting hairs in this house; why not? well, it's not a habit of ours, that's all," Mme. Verdurin replied, while Dr. Cottard gazed at her with open-mouthed admiration, and yearned to be able to follow her as she skipped lightly from one stepping-stone to another of her stock of ready-made phrases. Both he, however, and Mme. Cottard, with a kind of common sense which is shared by many people of humble origin, would always take care not to express an opinion, or to pretend to admire a piece of music which they would confess to each other, once they were safely at home, that they no more understood than they could understand the art of 'Master' Biche. Inasmuch as the public cannot recognise the charm, the beauty, even the outlines of nature save in the stereotyped impressions of an art which they have gradually assimilated, while an original artist starts by rejecting those impressions, so M. and Mme. Cottard, typical, in this respect, of the public, were incapable of finding, either in Vinteuil's sonata or in Biche's portraits, what constituted harmony, for them, in music or beauty in painting. It appeared to them, when the pianist played his sonata, as though he were striking haphazard from the piano a medley of notes which bore no relation to the musical forms to which they themselves were accustomed, and that the painter simply flung the colours haphazard upon his canvas. When, on one of these, they were able to distinguish a human form, they always found it coarsened and vulgarised (that is to say lacking all the elegance of the school of painting through whose spectacles they themselves were in the habit of seeing the people—real, living people, who passed them in the streets) and devoid of truth, as though M. Biche had not known how the human shoulder was constructed, or that a woman's hair was not, ordinarily, purple.

And yet, when the 'faithful' were scattered out of earshot, the Doctor felt that the opportunity was too good to be missed, and so (while Mme. Verdurin was adding a final word of commendation of Vinteuil's sonata) like a would-be swimmer who jumps into the water, so as to learn, but chooses a moment when there are not too many people looking on: "Yes, indeed; he's what they call a musician *di primo cartello!*" he exclaimed, with a sudden determination.

Swann discovered no more than that the recent publication of Vinteuil's sonata had caused a great stir among the most advanced school of musicians, but that it was still unknown to the general public.

"I know some one, quite well, called Vinteuil," said Swann, thinking of the old music-master at Combray who had taught my grandmother's sisters.

"Perhaps that's the man!" cried Mme. Verdurin.

"Oh, no!" Swann burst out laughing. "If you had ever seen him for a moment you wouldn't put the question."

"Then to put the question is to solve the problem?" the Doctor suggested.

"But it may well be some relative," Swann went on. "That would be bad enough; but, after all, there is no reason why a genius shouldn't have a cousin who is a silly old fool. And if that should be so, I swear there's no known or unknown form of torture I wouldn't undergo to get the old fool to introduce me to the man who composed the sonata; starting with the torture of the old fool's company, which would be ghastly."

The painter understood that Vinteuil was seriously ill at the moment, and that Dr. Potain despaired of his life.

"What!" cried Mme. Verdurin, "Do people still call in Potain?"

"Ah! Mme. Verdurin," Cottard simpered, "you forget that you are speaking of one of my colleagues—I should say, one of my masters."

The painter had heard, somewhere, that Vinteuil was threatened with the loss of his reason. And he insisted that signs of this could be detected in certain passages in the sonata. This remark did not strike Swann as ridiculous; rather, it puzzled him. For, since a purely musical work contains none of those logical sequences, the interruption or confusion of which, in spoken or written language, is a proof of insanity, so insanity diagnosed in a sonata seemed to him as mysterious a thing as the insanity of a dog or a horse, although instances may be observed of these.

"Don't speak to me about 'your masters'; you know ten times as much as he does!" Mme. Verdurin answered Dr. Cottard, in the tone of a woman who has the courage of her convictions, and is quite ready to stand up to anyone who disagrees with her. "Anyhow, you don't kill your patients!"

"But, Madame, he is in the Academy." The Doctor smiled with bitter irony. "If a sick person prefers to die at the hands of one of the Princes of Science. . . It is far more smart to be able to say, 'Yes, I have Potain.' "

"Oh, indeed! More smart, is it?" said Mme. Verdurin. "So there are fashions, nowadays, in illness, are there? I didn't know that. . . . Oh, you do make me laugh!" she screamed, suddenly, burying her face in her hands. "And here was I, poor thing, talking quite seriously, and never seeing that you were pulling my leg."

As for M. Verdurin, finding it rather a strain to start laughing again over so small a matter, he was content with puffing out a cloud of smoke from his pipe, while he reflected sadly that he could never again hope to keep pace with his wife in her Atalanta-flights across the field of mirth.

"D'you know; we like your friend so very much," said Mme. Verdurin, later, when Odette was bidding her good night. "He is so unaffected, quite charming. If they're all like that, the friends you want to bring here, by all means bring them."

M. Verdurin remarked that Swann had failed, all the same, to appreciate the pianist's aunt.

"I dare say he felt a little strange, poor man," suggested Mme. Verdurin. "You can't expect him to catch the tone of the house the first time he comes; like Cottard, who has been one of our little 'clan' now for years. The first time doesn't count; it's just for looking round and finding out things. Odette, he understands all right, he's to join us to-morrow at the Châtelet. Perhaps you might call for him and bring him."

"No, he doesn't want that."

"Oh, very well; just as you like. Provided he doesn't fail us at the last moment."

Greatly to Mme. Verdurin's surprise, he never failed them. He would go to meet them, no matter where, at restaurants outside Paris (not that they went there much at first, for the season had not yet begun), and more frequently at the play, in which Mme. Verdurin delighted. One evening, when they were dining at home, he heard her complain that she had not one of those permits which would save her the trouble of waiting at doors and standing in crowds, and say how useful it would be to them at first-nights, and gala performances at the Opera, and what a nuisance it had been, not having one, on the day of Gambetta's funeral. Swann never spoke of his distinguished friends, but only of such as might be regarded as detrimental, whom, therefore, he thought it snobbish, and in not very good taste to conceal; while he frequented the Faubourg Saint-Germain he had come to include, in the latter class, all his friends in the official world of the Third Republic, and so broke in, without thinking: "I'll see to that, all right. You shall have it in time for the *Danicheff* revival. I shall be lunching with the Prefect of Police to-morrow, as it happens, at the Elysée."

"What's that? The Elysée?" Dr. Cottard roared in a voice of thunder.

"Yes, at M. Grévy's," replied Swann, feeling a little awkward at the effect which his announcement had produced.

"Are you often taken like that?" the painter asked Cottard, with mock-seriousness.

As a rule, once an explanation had been given, Cottard would say: "Ah, good, good; that's all right, then," after which he would shew not the least trace of emotion. But this time Swann's last words, instead of the usual calming effect, had that of heating, instantly, to boiling-point his astonishment at the discovery that a man with whom he himself was actually sitting at table, a man who had no official position, no honours or distinction of any sort, was on visiting terms with the Head of the State.

"What's that you say? M. Grévy? Do you know M. Grévy?" he demanded of Swann, in the stupid and incredulous tone of a constable on duty at the palace, when a stranger has come up and asked to see the President of the Republic; until, guessing from his words and manner what, as the newspapers say, 'it is a case of,' he assures the poor lunatic that he will be admitted at once, and points the way to the reception ward of the police infirmary.

"I know him slightly; we have some friends in common" (Swann dared not add that one of these friends was the Prince of Wales). "Anyhow, he is very free with his invitations, and, I assure you, his luncheon-parties are not the least bit amusing; they're very simple affairs, too, you know; never more than eight at table," he went on, trying desperately to cut out everything that seemed to shew off his relations with the President in a light too dazzling for the Doctor's eyes.

Whereupon Cottard, at once conforming in his mind to the literal interpretation of what Swann was saying, decided that invitations from M.

Grévy were very little sought after, were sent out, in fact, into the highways and hedge-rows. And from that moment he never seemed at all surprised to hear that Swann, or anyone else, was 'always at the Elysée'; he even felt a little sorry for a man who had to go to luncheon-parties which, he himself admitted, were a bore.

"Ah, good, good; that's quite all right then," he said, in the tone of a customs official who has been suspicious up to now, but, after hearing your explanations, stamps your passport and lets you proceed on your journey without troubling to examine your luggage.

"I can well believe you don't find them amusing, those parties; indeed, it's very good of you to go to them!" said Mme. Verdurin, who regarded the President of the Republic only as a 'bore' to be especially dreaded, since he had at his disposal means of seduction, and even of compulsion, which, if employed to captivate her 'faithful,' might easily make them 'fail.' "It seems, he's as deaf as a post; and eats with his fingers."

"Upon my word! Then it can't be much fun for you, going there." A note of pity sounded in the Doctor's voice; and then struck by the number —only eight at table—"Are these luncheons what you would describe as 'intimate'?" he inquired briskly, not so much out of idle curiosity as in his linguistic zeal.

But so great and glorious a figure was the President of the French Republic in the eyes of Dr. Cottard that neither the modesty of Swann nor the spite of Mme. Verdurin could ever wholly efface that first impression, and he never sat down to dinner with the Verdurins without asking anxiously, "D'you think we shall see M. Swann here this evening? He is a personal friend of M. Grévy's. I suppose that means he's what you'd call a 'gentleman'?" He even went to the length of offering Swann a card of invitation to the Dental Exhibition.

"This will let you in, and anyone you take with you," he explained, "but dogs are not admitted. I'm just warning you, you understand, because some friends of mine went there once, who hadn't been told, and there was the devil to pay."

As for M. Verdurin, he did not fail to observe the distressing effect upon his wife of the discovery that Swann had influential friends of whom he had never spoken.

If no arrangement had been made to 'go anywhere,' it was at the Verdurins' that Swann would find the 'little nucleus' assembled, but he never appeared there except in the evenings, and would hardly ever accept their invitations to dinner, in spite of Odette's entreaties.

"I could dine with you alone somewhere, if you'd rather," she suggested.

"But what about Mme. Verdurin?"

"Oh, that's quite simple. I need only say that my dress wasn't ready, or that my cab came late. There is always some excuse."

"How charming of you."

But Swann said to himself that, if he could make Odette feel (by consenting to meet her only after dinner) that there were other pleasures which he preferred to that of her company, then the desire that she felt for his would be all the longer in reaching the point of satiety. Besides, as he infinitely preferred to Odette's style of beauty that of a little working girl, as fresh and plump as a rose, with whom he happened to be simultaneously in love, he preferred to spend the first part of the evening with her, knowing that he was sure to see Odette later on. For the same reason, he would never allow Odette to call for him at his house, to take him on to the Verdurins'. The little girl used to wait, not far from his door, at a street corner; Rémi, his coachman, knew where to stop; she would jump in beside him, and hold him in her arms until the carriage drew up at the Verdurins'. He would enter the drawing-room; and there, while Mme. Verdurin, pointing to the roses which he had sent her that morning, said: "I am furious with you!" and sent him to the place kept for him, by the side of Odette, the pianist would play to them—for their two selves, and for no one else—that little phrase by Vinteuil which was, so to speak, the national anthem of their love. He began, always, with a sustained *tremolo* from the violin part, which, for several bars, was unaccompanied, and filled all the foreground; until suddenly it seemed to be drawn aside, and —just as in those interiors by Pieter de Hooch, where the subject is set back a long way through the narrow framework of a half-opened door—infinitely remote, in colour quite different, velvety with the radiance of some intervening light, the little phrase appeared, dancing, pastoral, interpolated, episodic, belonging to another world. It passed, with simple and immortal movements, scattering on every side the bounties of its grace, smiling ineffably still; but Swann thought that he could now discern in it some disenchantment. It seemed to be aware how vain, how hollow was the happiness to which it shewed the way. In its airy grace there was, indeed, something definitely achieved, and complete in itself, like the mood of philosophic detachment which follows an outburst of vain regret. But little did that matter to him; he looked upon the sonata less in its own light—as what it might express, had, in fact, expressed to a certain musician, ignorant that any Swann or Odette, anywhere in the world, existed, when he composed it, and would express to all those who should hear it played in centuries to come—than as a pledge, a token of his love, which made even the Verdurins and their little pianist think of Odette and, at the same time, of himself—which bound her to him by a lasting tie; and at that point he had (whimsically entreated by Odette) abandoned the idea of getting some 'professional' to play over to him the whole sonata, of which he still knew no more than this one passage. "Why do you want the rest?" she had asked him. "Our little bit; that's all we need." He went farther; agonised by the reflection, at the moment when it passed by him, so near and yet so infinitely remote, that, while it was addressed to their ears, it knew them not, he would regret, almost, that it had a meaning of its own, an intrinsic and unalterable beauty, foreign to themselves, just as in the jewels given to us, or even in the letters written to us by a woman with whom we are in love, we find fault with the 'water' of a stone, or with the words of a sentence because they are not fashioned exclusively from the spirit of a fleeting intimacy and of a 'lass unparallel'd.'

It would happen, as often as not, that he had stayed so long outside, with his little girl, before going to the Verdurins' that, as soon as the little phrase had been rendered by the pianist, Swann would discover that it was almost time for Odette to go home. He used to take her back as far as the door of her little house in the Rue La Pérouse, behind the Arc de Triomphe. And it was perhaps on this account, and so as not to demand the monopoly of her favours, that he sacrificed the pleasure (not so essential to his well-being) of seeing her earlier in the evening, of arriving with her at the Verdurins', to the exercise of this other privilege, for which she was grateful, of their leaving together; a privilege which he valued all the more because, thanks to it, he had the feeling that no one else would see her, no one would thrust himself between them, no one could prevent him from remaining with her in spirit, after he had left her for the night.

And so, night after night, she would be taken home in Swann's carriage; and one night, after she had got down, and while he stood at the gate and murmured "Till to-morrow, then!" she turned impulsively from him, plucked a last lingering chrysanthemum in the tiny garden which flanked the pathway from the street to her house, and as he went back to his carriage thrust it into his hand. He held it pressed to his lips during the drive home, and when, in due course, the flower withered, locked it away, like something very precious, in a secret drawer of his desk.

He would escort her to her gate, but no farther. Twice only had he gone inside to take part in the ceremony—of such vital importance in her life—of 'afternoon tea.' The loneliness and emptiness of those short streets (consisting, almost entirely, of low-roofed houses, self-contained but not detached, their monotony interrupted here and there by the dark intrusion of some sinister little shop, at once an historical document and a sordid survival from the days when the district was still one of ill repute), the snow which had lain on the garden-beds or clung to the branches of the trees, the careless disarray of the season, the assertion, in this man-made city, of a state of nature, had all combined to add an element of mystery to the warmth, the flowers, the luxury which he had found inside.

Passing by (on his left-hand side, and on what, although raised some way above the street, was the ground floor of the house) Odette's bedroom, which looked out to the back over another little street running parallel with her own, he had climbed a staircase that went straight up between dark painted walls, from which hung Oriental draperies, strings of Turkish beads, and a huge Japanese lantern, suspended by a silken cord from the ceiling (which last, however, so that her visitors should not have to complain of the want of any of the latest comforts of Western civilisation, was lighted by a gas-jet inside), to the two drawing-rooms, large and small. These were entered through a narrow lobby, the wall of which, chequered with the lozenges of a wooden trellis such as you see on garden walls, only gilded, was lined from end to end by a long rectangular box in which bloomed, as though in a hothouse, a row of large chrysanthemums, at that time still uncommon, though by no means so large as the mammoth blossoms which horticulturists have since succeeded in making grow. Swann was irritated, as a rule, by the sight of these flowers, which had then been 'the rage' in Paris for about a year, but it had pleased him, on this occasion, to see the gloom of the little lobby shot with rays of pink and gold and white by the fragrant petals of these ephemeral stars, which kindle their cold fires in the murky atmosphere of winter afternoons. Odette had received him in a tea-gown of pink silk, which left her neck and arms bare. She had made him sit down beside her in one of the many mysterious little retreats which had been contrived in the various recesses of the room, sheltered by enormous palmtrees growing out of pots of Chinese porcelain, or by screens upon which were fastened photographs and fans and bows of ribbon. She had said at once, "You're not comfortable there; wait a minute, I'll arrange things for you," and with a titter of laughter, the complacency of which implied that some little invention of her own was being brought into play, she had installed behind his head and beneath his feet great cushions of Japanese silk, which she pummelled and buffeted as though determined to lavish on him all her riches, and regardless of their value. But when her footman began to come into the room, bringing, one after another, the innumerable lamps which (contained, mostly, in porcelain vases) burned singly or in pairs upon the different pieces of furniture as upon so many altars, rekindling in the twilight, already almost nocturnal, of this winter afternoon, the glow of a sunset more lasting, more roseate, more human—filling, perhaps, with romantic wonder the thoughts of some solitary lover, wandering in the street below and brought to a standstill before the mystery of the human presence which those lighted windows at once revealed and screened from sight—she had kept an eye sharply fixed on the servant, to see whether he set each of the lamps down in the place appointed it. She felt that, if he were to put even one of them where it ought not to be, the general effect of her drawing-room would be destroyed, and that her portrait, which rested upon a sloping easel draped with plush, would not catch the light. And so, with feverish impatience, she followed the man's clumsy movements, scolding him severely when he passed too close to a pair of beaupots, which she made a point of always tidying herself, in case the plants should be knocked over—and went across to them now to make sure that he had not broken off any of the flowers. She found something 'quaint' in the shape of each of her Chinese ornaments, and also in her orchids, the cattleyas especially (these being, with chrysanthemums, her favourite flowers), because they had the supreme merit of not looking in the least like other flowers, but of being made, apparently, out of scraps of silk or satin. "It looks just as though it had been cut out of the lining of my cloak," she said to Swann, pointing to an orchid, with a shade of respect in her voice for so 'smart' a flower, for this distinguished, unexpected sister whom nature had suddenly bestowed upon her, so far removed from her in the scale of existence, and yet so delicate, so refined, so much more worthy than many real women of admission to her drawing-room. As she drew his attention, now to the fiery-tongued dragons painted upon a bowl or stitched upon a fire-screen, now to a fleshy cluster of orchids, now to a dromedary of inlaid silver-work with ruby eyes, which kept company, upon her mantelpiece, with a toad carved in jade, she would pretend now to be shrinking from the ferocity of the monsters or laughing at their absurdity, now blushing at the indecency of the flowers, now carried away by an irresistible desire to run across and kiss the toad and dromedary, calling them 'darlings.' And these affectations were in sharp contrast to the sincerity of some of her attitudes, notably her devotion to Our Lady of the Laghetto who had once, when Odette was living at Nice, cured her of a mortal illness, and whose medal, in gold, she always carried on her person, attributing to it unlimited powers. She poured out Swann's tea, inquired "Lemon or cream?" and, on his answering "Cream, please," went on, smiling, "A cloud!" And as he pronounced it excellent, "You see, I know just how you like it." This tea had indeed seemed to Swann, just as it seemed to her, something precious, and love is so far obliged to find some justification for itself, some guarantee of its duration in pleasures which, on the contrary, would have no existence apart from love and must cease with its passing, that when he left her, at seven o'clock, to go and dress for the evening, all the way home, sitting bolt upright in his brougham, unable to repress the happiness with which the afternoon's adventure had filled him, he kept on repeating to himself: "What fun it would be to have a little woman like that in a place where one could always be certain of finding, what one never can be certain of finding, a really good cup of tea." An hour or so later he received a note from Odette, and at once recognised that florid handwriting, in which an affectation of British stiffness imposed an apparent discipline upon its shapeless characters, significant, perhaps, to less intimate eyes than his, of an untidiness of mind, a fragmentary education, a want of sincerity and decision. Swann had left his cigarette-case at her house. "Why," she wrote, "did you not forget your heart also? I should never have let you have that back."

More important, perhaps, was a second visit which he paid her, a little later. On his way to the house, as always when he knew that they were to meet, he formed a picture of her in his mind; and the necessity, if he was to find any beauty in her face, of fixing his eyes on the fresh and rosy protuberance of her cheekbones, and of shutting out all the rest of those cheeks which were so often languorous and sallow, except when they were punctuated with little fiery spots, plunged him in acute depression, as proving that one's ideal is always unattainable, and one's actual happiness mediocre. He was taking her an engraving which she had asked to see. She was not very well; she received him, wearing a wrapper of mauve *crêpe de Chine,* which draped her bosom, like a mantle, with a richly embroidered web. As she stood there beside him, brushing his cheek with the loosened tresses of her hair, bending one knee in what was almost a dancer's pose, so that she could lean without tiring herself over the picture, at which she was gazing, with bended head, out of those great eyes, which seemed so weary and so sullen when there was nothing to animate her, Swann was struck by her resemblance to the figure of Zipporah, Jethro's Daughter, which is to be seen in one of the Sixtine frescoes. He had always found a peculiar fascination in tracing in the paintings of the Old Masters, not merely the general characteristics of the people whom he encountered in his daily life, but rather what seems least susceptible of generalisation, the individual features of men and women whom he knew, as, for instance, in a bust of the Doge Loredan by Antonio Rizzo, the prominent cheekbones, the slanting eyebrows, in short, a speaking likeness to his own coachman Rémi; in the colouring of a Ghirlandaio, the nose of M. de Palancy; in a portrait by Tintoretto, the invasion of the plumpness of the cheek by an outcrop of whisker, the broken nose, the penetrating stare, the swollen eyelids of Dr. du Boulbon. Perhaps because he had always regretted, in his heart, that he had confined his attention to the social side of life, had talked, always, rather than acted, he felt that he might find a sort of indulgence bestowed upon him by those great artists, in his perception of the fact that they also had regarded with pleasure and had admitted into the canon of their works such types of physiognomy as give those works the strongest possible certificate of reality and trueness to life; a modern, almost a topical savour; perhaps, also, he had so far succumbed to the prevailing frivolity of the world of fashion that he felt the necessity of finding in an old masterpiece some such obvious and refreshing allusion to a person about whom jokes could be made and repeated and enjoyed to-day. Perhaps, on the other hand, he had retained enough of the artistic temperament to be able to find a genuine satisfaction in watching these individual features take on a more general significance when he saw them, uprooted and disembodied, in the abstract idea of similarity between an historic portrait and a modern original, whom it was not intended to represent. However that might be, and perhaps because the abundance of impressions which he, for some time past, had been receiving—though, indeed, they had come to him rather through the channel of his appreciation of music—had enriched his appetite for painting as well, it was with an unusual intensity of pleasure, a pleasure destined to have a lasting effect upon his character and conduct, that Swann remarked Odette's resemblance to the Zipporah of that Alessandro de Mariano, to whom one shrinks from giving his more popular surname, now that 'Botticelli' suggests not so much the actual work of the Master as that false and banal conception of it which has of late obtained common currency. He no longer based his estimate of the merit of Odette's face on the more or less good quality of her cheeks, and the softness and sweetness—as of carnation-petals—which, he supposed, would greet his lips there, should he ever hazard an embrace, but regarded it rather as a skein of subtle and lovely silken threads, which his gazing eyes collected and wound together, following the curving line from the skein to the ball, where he mingled the cadence of her neck with the spring of her hair and the droop of her eyelids, as though from a portrait of herself, in which her type was made clearly intelligible.

He stood gazing at her; traces of the old fresco were apparent in her face and limbs, and these he tried incessantly, afterwards, to recapture, both when he was with Odette, and when he was only thinking of her in her absence; and, albeit his admiration for the Florentine masterpiece was probably based upon his discovery that it had been reproduced in her, the similarity enhanced her beauty also, and rendered her more precious in his sight. Swann reproached himself with his failure, hitherto, to estimate at her true worth a creature whom the great Sandro would have adored, and counted himself fortunate that his pleasure in the contemplation of Odette found a justification in his own system of aesthetic. He told himself that, in choosing the thought of Odette as the inspiration of his dreams of ideal happiness, he was not, as he had until then supposed, falling back, merely, upon an expedient of doubtful and certainly inadequate value, since she contained in herself what satisfied the utmost refinement of his taste in art. He failed to observe that this quality would not naturally avail to bring Odette into the category of women whom he found desirable, simply because his desires had always run counter to his aesthetic taste. The words 'Florentine painting' were invaluable to Swann. They enabled him (gave him, as it were, a legal title) to introduce the image of Odette into a world of dreams and fancies which, until then, she had been debarred from entering, and where she assumed a new and nobler form. And whereas the mere sight of her in the flesh, by perpetually reviving his misgivings as to the quality of her face, her figure, the whole of her beauty, used to cool the ardour of his love, those misgivings were swept away and that love confirmed now that he could re-erect his estimate of her on the sure foundations of his aesthetic principles; while the kiss, the bodily surrender which would have seemed natural and but moderately attractive, had they been granted him by a creature of somewhat withered flesh and sluggish blood, coming, as now they came, to crown his adoration of a masterpiece in a gallery, must, it seemed, prove as exquisite as they would be supernatural.

And when he was tempted to regret that, for months past, he had done nothing but visit Odette, he would assure himself that he was not unreasonable in giving up much of his time to the study of an inestimably precious work of art, cast for once in a new, a different, an especially charming metal, in an unmatched exemplar which he would contemplate at one moment with the humble, spiritual, disinterested mind of an artist, at another with the pride, the selfishness, the sensual thrill of a collector.

On his study table, at which he worked, he had placed, as it were a photograph of Odette, a reproduction of Jethro's Daughter. He would gaze in admiration at the large eyes, the delicate features in which the imperfection of her skin might be surmised, the marvellous locks of hair that fell along her tired cheeks; and, adapting what he had already felt to be beautiful, on aesthetic grounds, to the idea of a living woman, he converted it into a series of physical merits which he congratulated himself on finding assembled in the person of one whom he might, ultimately, possess. The vague feeling of sympathy which attracts a spectator to a work of art, now that he knew the type, in warm flesh and blood, of Jethro's Daughter, became a desire which more than compensated, thenceforward, for that with which Odette's physical charms had at first failed to inspire him. When he had sat for a long time gazing at the Botticelli, he would think of his own living Botticelli, who seemed all the lovelier in contrast, and as he drew towards him the photograph of Zipporah he would imagine that he was holding Odette against his heart.

It was not only Odette's indifference, however, that he must take pains to circumvent; it was also, not infrequently, his own; feeling that, since Odette had had every facility for seeing him, she seemed no longer to have very much to say to him when they did meet, he was afraid lest the manner—at once trivial, monotonous, and seemingly unalterable—which she now adopted when they were together should ultimately destroy in him that romantic hope, that a day might come when she would make avowal of her passion, by which hope alone he had become and would remain her lover. And so to alter, to give a fresh moral aspect to that Odette, of whose unchanging mood he was afraid of growing weary, he wrote, suddenly, a letter full of hinted discoveries and feigned indignation, which he sent off so that it should reach her before dinner-time. He knew that she would be frightened, and that she would reply, and he hoped that, when the fear of losing him clutched at her heart, it would force from her words such as he had never yet heard her utter: and he was right—by repeating this device he had won from her the most affectionate letters that she had, so far, written him, one of them (which she had sent to him at midday by a special messenger from the Maison Dorée—it was the day of the Paris-Murcie Fête given for the victims of the recent floods in Murcia) beginning "My dear, my hand trembles so that I can scarcely write——"; and these letters he had kept in the same drawer as the withered chrysanthemum. Or else, if she had not had time to write, when he arrived at the Verdurins' she would come running up to him with an "I've something to say to you!" and he would gaze curiously at the revelation in her face and speech of what she had hitherto kept concealed from him of her heart.

Even as he drew near to the Verdurins' door, and caught sight of the great lamp-lit spaces of the drawing-room windows, whose shutters were never closed, he would begin to melt at the thought of the charming creature whom he would see, as he entered the room, basking in that golden light. Here and there the figures of the guests stood out, sharp and black, between lamp and window, shutting off the light, like those little pictures which one sees sometimes pasted here and there upon a glass screen, whose other panes are mere transparencies. He would try to make out Odette. And then, when he was once inside, without thinking, his eyes sparkled suddenly with such radiant happiness that M. Verdurin said to the painter: "H'm. Seems to be getting warm." Indeed, her presence gave the house what none other of the houses that he visited seemed to possess: a sort of tactual sense, a nervous system which ramified into each of its rooms and sent a constant stimulus to his heart.

And so the simple and regular manifestations of a social organism, namely the 'little clan,' were transformed for Swann into a series of daily encounters with Odette, and enabled him to feign indifference to the prospect of seeing her, or even a desire not to see her; in doing which he incurred no very great risk since, even although he had written to her during the day, he would of necessity see her in the evening and accompany her home.

But one evening, when, irritated by the thought of that inevitable dark drive together, he had taken his other 'little girl' all the way to the

Bois, so as to delay as long as possible the moment of his appearance at the Verdurins', he was so late in reaching them that Odette, supposing that he did not intend to come, had already left. Seeing the room bare of her, Swann felt his heart wrung by sudden anguish; he shook with the sense that he was being deprived of a pleasure whose intensity he began then for the first time to estimate, having always, hitherto, had that certainty of finding it whenever he would, which (as in the case of all our pleasures) reduced, if it did not altogether blind him to its dimensions.

"Did you notice the face he pulled when he saw that she wasn't here?" M. Verdurin asked his wife. "I think we may say that he's hooked."

"The face he pulled?" exploded Dr. Cottard who, having left the house for a moment to visit a patient, had just returned to fetch his wife and did not know whom they were discussing.

"D'you mean to say you didn't meet him on the doorstep—the loveliest of Swanns?"

"No. M. Swann has been here?"

"Just for a moment. We had a glimpse of a Swann tremendously agitated. In a state of nerves. You see, Odette had left."

"You mean to say that she has gone the 'whole hog' with him; that she has 'burned her boats'?" inquired the Doctor cautiously, testing the meaning of his phrases.

"Why, of course not; there's absolutely nothing in it; in fact, between you and me, I think she's making a great mistake, and behaving like a silly little fool, which she is, incidentally."

"Come, come, come!" said M. Verdurin, "How on earth do you know that there's 'nothing in it'? We haven't been there to see, have we now?"

"She would have told me," answered Mme. Verdurin with dignity. "I may say that she tells me everything. As she has no one else at present, I told her that she ought to live with him. She makes out that she can't; she admits, she was immensely attracted by him, at first; but he's always shy with her, and that makes her shy with him. Besides, she doesn't care for him in that way, she says; it's an ideal love, 'Platonic,' you know; she's afraid of rubbing the bloom off—oh, I don't know half the things she says, how should I? And yet he's exactly the sort of man she wants."

"I beg to differ from you," M. Verdurin courteously interrupted. "I am only half satisfied with the gentleman. I feel that he 'poses.' "

Mme. Verdurin's whole body stiffened, her eyes stared blankly as though she had suddenly been turned into a statue; a device by means of which she might be supposed not to have caught the sound of that unutterable word which seemed to imply that it was possible for people to 'pose' in her house, and, therefore, that there were people in the world who 'mattered more' than herself.

"Anyhow, if there is nothing in it, I don't suppose it's because our friend believes in her virtue. And yet, you never know; he seems to believe in her intelligence. I don't know whether you heard the way he lectured her the other evening about Vinteuil's sonata. I am devoted to Odette, but really—to expound theories of aesthetic to her—the man must be a prize idiot."

"Look here, I won't have you saying nasty things about Odette," broke in Mme. Verdurin in her 'spoiled child' manner. "She is charming."

"There's no reason why she shouldn't be charming; we are not saying anything nasty about her, only that she is not the embodiment of either virtue or intellect. After all," he turned to the painter, "does it matter so very much whether she is virtuous or not? You can't tell; she might be a great deal less charming if she were."

On the landing Swann had run into the Verdurins' butler, who had been somewhere else a moment earlier, when he arrived, and who had been asked by Odette to tell Swann (but that was at least an hour ago) that she would probably stop to drink a cup of chocolate at Prévost's on her way home. Swann set off at once for Prévost's, but every few yards his carriage was held up by others, or by people crossing the street, loathsome obstacles each of which he would gladly have crushed beneath his wheels, were it not that a policeman fumbling with a note-book would delay him even longer than the actual passage of the pedestrian. He counted the minutes feverishly, adding a few seconds to each so as to be quite certain that he had not given himself short measure, and so, possibly, exaggerated whatever chance there might actually be of his arriving at Prévost's in time, and of finding her still there. And then, in a moment of illumination, like a man in a fever who awakes from sleep and is conscious of the absurdity of the dream-shapes among which his mind has been wandering without any clear distinction between himself and them, Swann suddenly perceived how foreign to his nature were the thoughts which he had been revolving in his mind ever since he had heard at the Verdurins' that Odette had left, how novel the heartache from which he was suffering, but of which he was only now conscious, as though he had just woken up. What! all this disturbance simply because he would not see Odette, now, till to-morrow, exactly what he had been hoping, not an hour before, as he drove toward Mme. Verdurin's. He was obliged to admit also that now, as he sat in the same carriage and drove to Prévost's, he was no longer the same man, was no longer alone even—but that a new personality was there beside him, adhering to him, amalgamated with him, a creature from whom he might, perhaps, be unable to liberate himself, towards whom he might have to adopt some such stratagem as one uses to outwit a master or a malady. And yet, during this last moment in which he had felt that another, a fresh personality was thus conjoined with his own, life had seemed, somehow, more interesting.

It was in vain that he assured himself that this possible meeting at Prévost's (the tension of waiting for which so ravished, stripped so bare the intervening moments that he could find nothing, not one idea, not one memory in his mind beneath which his troubled spirit might take shelter and repose) would probably, after all, should it take place, be much the same as all their meetings, of no great importance. As on every other evening, once he was in Odette's company, once he had begun to cast furtive glances at her changing countenance, and instantly to withdraw his eyes lest she should read in them the first symbols of desire and believe no more in his indifference, he would cease to be able even to think of her, so busy would he be in the search for pretexts which would enable him not to leave her immediately, and to assure himself, without betraying his concern, that he would find her again, next evening, at the Verdurins'; pretexts, that is to say, which would enable him to prolong for the time being, and to renew for one day more the disappointment, the torturing deception that must always come to him with the vain presence of this woman, whom he might approach, yet never dared embrace.

She was not at Prévost's; he must search for her, then, in every restaurant upon the boulevards. To save time, while he went in one direction, he sent in the other his coachman Rémi (Rizzo's Doge Loredan) for whom he presently—after a fruitless search—found himself waiting at the spot where the carriage was to meet him. It did not appear, and Swann tantalised himself with alternate pictures of the approaching moment, as one in which Rémi would say to him: "Sir, the lady is there," or as one in which Rémi would say to him: "Sir, the lady was not in any of the cafés." And so he saw himself faced by the close of his evening—a thing uniform, and yet bifurcated by the intervening accident which would either put an end to his agony by discovering Odette, or would oblige him to abandon any hope of finding her that night, to accept the necessity of returning home without having seen her.

The coachman returned; but, as he drew up opposite him, Swann asked, not "Did you find the lady?" but "Remind me, to-morrow, to order in some more firewood. I am sure we must be running short." Perhaps he had persuaded himself that, if Rémi had at last found Odette in some café, where she was waiting for him still, then his night of misery was already obliterated by the realisation, begun already in his mind, of a night of joy, and that there was no need for him to hasten towards the attainment of a happiness already captured and held in a safe place, which would not escape his grasp again. But it was also by the force of inertia; there was in his soul that want of adaptability which can be seen in the bodies of certain people who, when the moment comes to avoid a collision, to snatch their clothes out of reach of a flame, or to perform any other such necessary movement, take their time (as the saying is), begin by remaining for a moment in their original position, as though seeking to find in it a starting-point, a source of strength and motion. And probably, if the coachman had interrupted him with, "I have found the lady," he would have answered, "Oh, yes, of course; that's what I told you to do. I had quite forgotten," and would have continued to discuss his supply of firewood, so as to hide from his servant the emotion that he had felt, and to give himself time to break away from the thraldom of his anxieties and abandon himself to pleasure.

The coachman came back, however, with the report that he could not find her anywhere, and added the advice, as an old and privileged servant, "I think, sir, that all we can do now is to go home."

But the air of indifference which Swann could so lightly assume when Rémi uttered his final, unalterable response, fell from him like a cast-off cloak when he saw Rémi attempt to make him abandon hope and retire from the quest.

"Certainly not!" he exclaimed. "We must find the lady. It is most important. She would be extremely put out—it's a business matter—and vexed with me if she didn't see me."

"But I do not see how the lady can be vexed, sir," answered Rémi, "since it was she that went away without waiting for you, sir, and said she was going to Prévost's, and then wasn't there."

Meanwhile the restaurants were closing, and their lights began to go out. Under the trees of the boulevards there were still a few people strolling to and fro, barely distinguishable in the gathering darkness. Now and then the ghost of a woman glided up to Swann, murmured a few words in his ear, asked him to take her home, and left him shuddering. Anxiously he explored every one of these vaguely seen shapes, as though among the phantoms of the dead, in the realms of darkness, he had been searching for a lost Eurydice.

Among all the methods by which love is brought into being, among all the agents which disseminate that blessed bane, there are few so efficacious as the great gust of agitation which, now and then, sweeps over the human spirit. For then the creature in whose company we are seeking amusement at the moment, her lot is cast, her fate and ours decided, that is the creature whom we shall henceforward love. It is not necessary that she should have pleased us, up till then, any more, or even as much as others. All that is necessary is that our taste for her should become exclusive. And that condition is fulfilled so soon as—in the moment when she has failed to meet us—for the pleasure which we were on the point of enjoying in her charming company is abruptly substituted an anxious torturing desire, whose object is the creature herself, an irrational, absurd desire, which the laws of civilised society make it impossible to satisfy and difficult to assuage—the insensate, agonising desire to possess her.

Swann made Rémi drive him to such restaurants as were still open; it was the sole hypothesis, now, of that happiness which he had contemplated so calmly; he no longer concealed his agitation, the price he set upon their meeting, and promised, in case of success, to reward his coachman, as though, by inspiring in him a will to triumph which would reinforce his own, he could bring it to pass, by a miracle, that Odette—assuming that she had long since gone home to bed,—might yet be found seated in some restaurant on the boulevards. He pursued the quest as far as the Maison Dorée, burst twice into Tortoni's and, still without catching sight of her, was emerging from the Café Anglais, striding with haggard gaze towards his carriage, which was waiting for him at the corner of the Boulevard des Italiens, when he collided with a person coming in the opposite direction; it was Odette; she explained, later, that there had been no room at Prévost's, that she had gone, instead, to sup at the Maison Dorée, and had been sitting there in an alcove where he must have overlooked her, and that she was now looking for her carriage.

She had so little expected to see him that she started back in alarm. As for him, he had ransacked the streets of Paris, not that he supposed it possible that he should find her, but because he would have suffered even more cruelly by abandoning the attempt. But now the joy (which, his reason had never ceased to assure him, was not, that evening at least, to be realised) was suddenly apparent, and more real than ever before; for he himself had contributed nothing to it by anticipating probabilities,—it remained integral and external to himself; there was no need for him to draw on his own resources to endow it with truth—'twas from itself that there emanated, 'twas itself that projected towards him that truth whose glorious rays melted and scattered like the cloud of a dream the sense of loneliness which had lowered over him, that truth upon which he had supported, nay founded, albeit unconsciously, his vision of bliss. So will a traveller, who has come down, on a day of glorious weather, to the Mediterranean shore, and is doubtful whether they still exist, those lands which he has left, let his eyes be dazzled, rather than cast a backward glance, by the radiance streaming towards him from the luminous and unfading azure at his feet.

He climbed after her into the carriage which she had kept waiting, and ordered his own to follow.

She had in her hand a bunch of cattleyas, and Swann could see, beneath the film of lace that covered her head, more of the same flowers fastened to a swansdown plume. She was wearing, under her cloak, a flowing gown of black velvet, caught up on one side so as to reveal a large triangular patch of her white silk skirt, with an 'insertion,' also of white silk, in the cleft of her low-necked bodice, in which were fastened a few more cattleyas. She had scarcely recovered from the shock which the sight of Swann had given her, when some obstacle made the horse start to one side. They were thrown forward from their seats; she uttered a cry, and fell back quivering and breathless.

"It's all right," he assured her, "don't be frightened." And he slipped his arm round her shoulder, supporting her body against his own; then went on: "Whatever you do, don't utter a word; just make a sign, yes or no, or you'll be out of breath again. You won't mind if I put the flowers straight on your bodice; the jolt has loosened them. I'm afraid of their dropping out; I'm just going to fasten them a little more securely."

She was not used to being treated with so much formality by men, and smiled as she answered: "No, not at all; I don't mind in the least."

But he, chilled a little by her answer, perhaps, also, to bear out the pretence that he had been sincere in adopting the stratagem, or even because he was already beginning to believe that he had been, exclaimed: "No, no; you mustn't speak. You will be out of breath again. You can easily answer in signs; I shall understand. Really and truly now, you don't mind my doing this? Look, there is a little—I think it must be pollen, spilt over your dress,—may I brush it off with my hand? That's not too hard; I'm not hurting you, am I? I'm tickling you, perhaps, a little; but I don't want to touch the velvet in case I rub it the wrong way. But, don't you see, I really had to fasten the flowers; they would have fallen out if I hadn't. Like that, now; if I just push them a little farther down. . . . Seriously, I'm not annoying you, am I? And if I just sniff them to see whether they've really lost all their scent? I don't believe I ever smelt any before; may I? Tell the truth, now."

Still smiling, she shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly, as who should say, "You're quite mad; you know very well that I like it."

He slipped his other hand upwards along Odette's cheek; she fixed her eyes on him with that languishing and solemn air which marks the women of the old Florentine's paintings, in whose faces he had found the type of hers; swimming at the brink of her fringed lids, her brilliant eyes, large and finely drawn as theirs, seemed on the verge of breaking from her face and rolling down her cheeks like two great tears. She bent her neck, as all their necks may be seen to bend, in the pagan scenes as well as in the scriptural. And although her attitude was, doubtless, habitual and instinctive, one which she knew to be appropriate to such moments, and was careful not to forget to assume, she seemed to need all her strength to hold her face back, as though some invisible force were drawing it down towards Swann's. And Swann it was who, before she allowed her face, as though despite her efforts, to fall upon his lips, held it back for a moment longer, at a little distance between his hands. He had intended to leave time for her mind to overtake her body's movements, to recognise the dream which she had so long cherished and to assist at its realisation, like a mother invited as a spectator when a prize is given to the child whom she has reared and loves. Perhaps, moreover, Swann himself was fixing upon these features of an Odette not yet possessed, not even kissed by him, on whom he was looking now for the last time, that comprehensive gaze with which, on the day of his departure, a traveller strives to bear away with him in memory the view of a country to which he may never return.

But he was so shy in approaching her that, after this evening which had begun by his arranging her cattleyas and had ended in her complete surrender, whether from fear of chilling her, or from reluctance to appear, even retrospectively, to have lied, or perhaps because he lacked the audacity to formulate a more urgent requirement than this (which could always be repeated, since it had not annoyed her on the first occasion), he resorted to the same pretext on the following days. If she had any cattleyas pinned to her bodice, he would say: "It is most unfortunate; the cattleyas don't need tucking in this evening; they've not been disturbed as they were the other night; I think, though, that this one isn't quite straight. May I see if they have more scent than the others?" Or else, if she had none: "Oh! no cattleyas this evening; then there's nothing for me to arrange." So that for some time there was no change from the procedure which he had followed on that first evening, when he had started by touching her throat, with his fingers first and then with his lips, but their caresses began invariably with this modest exploration. And long afterwards, when the arrangement (or, rather, the ritual pretence of an arrangement) of her cattleyas had quite fallen into desuetude, the metaphor "Do a cattleya," transmuted into a simple verb which they would employ without a thought of its original meaning when they wished to refer to the act of physical possession (in which, paradoxically, the possessor possesses nothing), survived to commemorate in their vocabulary the long forgotten custom from which it sprang. And yet possibly this particular manner of saying "to make love" had not the precise significance of its synonyms. However disillusioned we may be about women, however we may regard the possession of even the most divergent types as an invariable and monotonous experience, every detail of which is known and can be described in advance, it still becomes a fresh and stimulating pleasure if the women concerned be—or be thought to be—so difficult as to oblige us to base our attack upon some unrehearsed incident in our relations with them, as was originally for Swann the arrangement of the cattleyas. He trembled as he hoped, that evening, (but Odette, he told himself, if she were deceived by his stratagem, could not guess his intention) that it was the possession of this woman that would emerge for him from their large and richly coloured petals; and the pleasure which he already felt, and which Odette tolerated, he thought, perhaps only because she was not yet aware of it herself, seemed to him for that reason—as it might have seemed to the first man when he enjoyed it amid the flowers of the earthly paradise—a pleasure which had never before existed, which he was striving now to create, a pleasure—and the special name which he was to give to it preserved its identity—entirely individual and new.

The ice once broken, every evening, when he had taken her home, he must follow her into the house; and often she would come out again in her dressing-gown, and escort him to his carriage, and would kiss him before the eyes of his coachman, saying: "What on earth does it matter what people see?" And on evenings when he did not go to the Verdurins' (which happened occasionally, now that he had opportunities of meeting Odette elsewhere), when—more and more rarely—he went into society, she would beg him to come to her on his way home, however late he might be. The season was spring, the nights clear and frosty. He would come away from an evening party, jump into his victoria, spread a rug over his knees, tell the friends who were leaving at the same time, and who insisted on his going home with them, that he could not, that he was not going in their direction; then the coachman would start off at a fast trot without further orders, knowing quite well where he had to go. His friends would be left marvelling, and, as a matter of fact, Swann was no longer the same man. No one ever received a letter from him now demanding an introduction to a woman. He had ceased to pay any attention to women, and kept away from the places in which they were ordinarily to be met. In a restaurant, or in the country, his manner was deliberately and directly the opposite of that by which, only a few days earlier, his friends would have recognised him, that manner which had seemed permanently and unalterably his own. To such an extent does passion manifest itself in us as a temporary and distinct character, which not only takes the place of our normal character but actually obliterates the signs by which that character has hitherto been discernible. On the other hand, there was one thing that was, now, invariable, namely that wherever Swann might be spending the evening, he never failed to go on afterwards to Odette. The interval of space separating her from him was one which he must as inevitably traverse as he must descend, by an irresistible gravitation, the steep slope of life itself. To be frank, as often as not, when he had stayed late at a party, he would have preferred to return home at once, without going so far out of his way, and to postpone their meeting until the morrow; but the very fact of his putting himself to such inconvenience at an abnormal hour in order to visit her, while he guessed that his friends, as he left them, were saying to one another: "He is tied hand and foot; there must certainly be a woman somewhere who insists on his going to her at all hours," made him feel that he was leading the life of the class of men whose existence is coloured by a love-affair, and in whom the perpetual sacrifice which they are making of their comfort and of their practical interests has engendered a spiritual charm. Then, though he may not consciously have taken this into consideration, the certainty that she was waiting for him, that she was not anywhere or with anyone else, that he would see her before he went home, drew the sting from that anguish, forgotten, it is true, but latent and ever ready to be reawakened, which he had felt on the evening when Odette had left the Verdurins' before his arrival, an anguish the actual cessation of which was so agreeable that it might even be called a state of happiness. Perhaps it was to that hour of anguish that there must be attributed the importance which Odette had since assumed in his life. Other people are, as a rule, so immaterial to us that, when we have entrusted to any one of them the power to cause so much suffering or happiness to ourselves, that person seems at once to belong to a different universe, is surrounded with poetry, makes of our lives a vast expanse, quick with sensation, on which that person and ourselves are ever more or less in contact. Swann could not without anxiety ask himself what Odette would mean to him in the years that were to come. Sometimes, as he looked up from his victoria on those fine and frosty nights of early spring, and saw the dazzling moonbeams fall between his eyes and the deserted streets, he would think of that other face, gleaming and faintly roseate like the moon's, which had, one day, risen on the horizon of his mind and since then had shed upon the world that mysterious light in which he saw it bathed. If he arrived after the hour at which Odette sent her servants to bed, before ringing the bell at the gate of her little garden, he would go round first into the other street, over which, at the ground-level, among the windows (all exactly alike, but darkened) of the adjoining houses, shone the solitary lighted window of her room. He would rap upon the pane, and she would hear the signal, and answer, before running to meet him at the gate. He would find, lying open on the piano, some of her favourite music, the *Valse des Roses,* the *Pauvre Fou* of Tagliafico (which, according to the instructions embodied in her will, was to be played at her funeral); but he would ask her, instead, to give him the little phrase from Vinteuil's sonata. It was true that Odette played vilely, but often the fairest impression that remains in our minds of a favourite air is one which has arisen out of a jumble of wrong notes struck by unskilful fingers upon a tuneless piano. The little phrase was associated still, in Swann's mind, with his love for Odette. He felt clearly that this love was something to which there were no corresponding external signs, whose meaning could not be proved by any but himself; he realised, too, that Odette's qualities were not such as to justify his setting so high a value on the hours he spent in her company. And often, when the cold government of reason stood unchallenged, he would readily have ceased to sacrifice so many of his intellectual and social interests to this imaginary pleasure. But the little phrase, as soon as it struck his ear, had the power to liberate in him the room that was needed to contain it; the proportions of Swann's soul were altered; a margin was left for a form of enjoyment which corresponded no more than his love for Odette to any external object, and yet was not, like his enjoyment of that love, purely individual, but assumed for him an objective reality superior to that of other concrete things. This thirst for an untasted charm, the little phrase would stimulate it anew in him, but without bringing him any definite gratification to assuage it. With the result that those parts of Swann's soul in which the little phrase had obliterated all care for material interests, those human considerations which affect all men alike, were left bare by it, blank pages on which he was at liberty to inscribe the name of Odette. Moreover, where Odette's affection might seem ever so little abrupt and disappointing, the little phrase would come to supplement it, to amalgamate with it its own mysterious essence. Watching Swann's face while he listened to the phrase, one would have said that he was inhaling an anaesthetic which allowed him to breathe more deeply. And the pleasure which the music gave him, which was shortly to create in him a real longing, was in fact closely akin, at such moments, to the pleasure which he would have derived from experimenting with perfumes, from entering into contract with a world for which we men were not created, which appears to lack form because our eyes cannot perceive it, to lack significance because it escapes our intelligence, to which we may attain by way of one sense only. Deep repose, mysterious refreshment for Swann,—for him whose eyes, although delicate interpreters of painting, whose mind, although an acute observer of manners, must bear for ever the indelible imprint of the barrenness of his life,—to feel himself transformed into a creature foreign to humanity, blinded, deprived of his logical faculty, almost a fantastic unicorn, a chimaera-like creature conscious of the world through his two ears alone. And as, notwithstanding, he sought in the little phrase for a meaning to which his intelligence could not descend, with what a strange frenzy of intoxication must he strip bare his innermost soul of the whole armour of reason, and make it pass, unattended, through the straining vessel, down into the dark filter of sound. He began to reckon up how much that was painful, perhaps even how much secret and unappeased sorrow underlay the sweetness of the phrase; and yet to him it brought no suffering. What matter though the phrase repeated that love is frail and fleeting, when his love was so strong! He played with the melancholy which the phrase diffused, he felt it stealing over him, but like a caress which only deepened and sweetened his sense of his own happiness. He would make Odette play him the phrase again, ten, twenty times on end, insisting that, while she played, she must never cease to kiss him. Every kiss provokes another. Ah, in those earliest days of love how naturally the kisses spring into life. How closely, in their abundance, are they pressed one against another; until lovers would find it as hard to count the kisses exchanged in an hour, as to count the flowers in a meadow in May. Then she would pretend to stop, saying: "How do you expect me to play when you keep on holding me? I can't do everything at once. Make up your mind what you want; am I to play the phrase or do you want to play with me?" Then he would become annoyed, and she would burst out with a laugh which was transformed, as it left her lips, and descended upon him in a shower of kisses. Or else she would look at him sulkily, and he would see once again a face worthy to figure in Botticelli's 'Life of Moses,' he would place it there, giving to Odette's neck the necessary inclination; and when he had finished her portrait in distemper, in the fifteenth century, on the wall of the Sixtine, the idea that she was, none the less, in the room with him still, by the piano, at that very moment, ready to be kissed and won, the idea of her material existence, of her being alive, would sweep over him with so violent an intoxication that, with eyes starting from his head and jaws that parted as though to devour her, he would fling himself upon this Botticelli maiden and kiss and bite her cheeks. And then, as soon as he had left the house, not without returning to kiss her once again, because he had forgotten to take away with him, in memory, some detail of her fragrance or of her features, while he drove home in his victoria, blessing the name of Odette who allowed him to pay her these daily visits, which, although they could not, he felt, bring any great happiness to her, still, by keeping him immune from the fever of jealousy—by removing from him every possibility of a fresh outbreak of the heart-sickness which had manifested itself in him that evening, when he had failed to find her at the Verdurins'—might help him to arrive, without any recurrence of those crises, of which the first had been so distressing that it must also be the last, at the termination of this strange series of hours in his life, hours almost enchanted, in the same manner as these other, following hours, in which he drove through a deserted Paris by the light of the moon: noticing as he drove home that the satellite had now changed its position, relatively to his own, and was almost touching the horizon; feeling that his love, also, was obedient to these immutable laws of nature, he asked himself whether this period, upon which he had entered, was to last much longer, whether presently his mind's eye would cease to behold that dear countenance, save as occupying a distant and diminished position, and on the verge of ceasing to shed on him the radiance of its charm. For Swann was finding in things once more, since he had fallen in love, the charm that he had found when, in his adolescence, he had fancied himself an artist; with this difference, that what charm lay in them now was conferred by Odette alone. He could feel reawakening in himself the inspirations of his boyhood, which had been dissipated among the frivolities of his later life, but they all bore, now, the reflection, the stamp of a particular being; and during the long hours which he now found a subtle pleasure in spending at home, alone with his convalescent spirit, he became gradually himself again, but himself in thraldom to another.

He went to her only in the evenings, and knew nothing of how she spent her time during the day, any more than he knew of her past; so little, indeed, that he had not even the tiny, initial clue which, by allowing us to imagine what we do not know, stimulates a desire for knowledge. And so he never asked himself what she might be doing, or what her life had been.

Only he smiled sometimes at the thought of how, some years earlier, when he still did not know her, some one had spoken to him of a woman who, if he remembered rightly, must certainly have been Odette, as of a 'tart,' a 'kept' woman, one of those women to whom he still attributed (having lived but little in their company) the entire set of characteristics, fundamentally perverse, with which they had been, for many years, endowed by the imagination of certain novelists. He would say to himself that one has, as often as not, only to take the exact counterpart of the reputation created by the world in order to judge a person fairly, when with such a character he contrasted that of Odette, so good, so simple, so enthusiastic in the pursuit of ideals, so nearly incapable of not telling the truth that, when he had once begged her, so that they might dine together alone, to write to Mme. Verdurin, saying that she was unwell, the next day he had seen her, face to face with Mme. Verdurin, who asked whether she had recovered, blushing, stammering, and, in spite of herself, revealing in every feature how painful, what a torture it was to her to act a lie; and, while in her answer she multiplied the fictitious details of an imaginary illness, seeming to ask pardon, by her suppliant look and her stricken accents, for the obvious falsehood of her words.

On certain days, however, though these came seldom, she would call upon him in the afternoon, to interrupt his musings or the essay on Vermeer to which he had latterly returned. His servant would come in to say that Mme. de Crécy was in the small drawing-room. He would go in search of her, and, when he opened the door, on Odette's blushing countenance, as soon as she caught sight of Swann, would appear—changing the curve of her lips, the look in her eyes, the moulding of her cheeks—an all-absorbing smile. Once he was left alone he would see again that smile, and her smile of the day before, another with which she had greeted him sometime else, the smile which had been her answer, in the carriage that night, when he had asked her whether she objected to his rearranging her cattleyas; and the life of Odette at all other times, since he knew nothing of it, appeared to him upon a neutral and colourless background, like those sheets of sketches by Watteau upon which one sees, here and there, in every corner and in all directions, traced in three colours upon the buff paper, innumerable smiles. But, once in a while, illuminating a chink of that existence which Swann still saw as a complete blank, even if his mind assured him that it was not so, because he was unable to imagine anything that might occupy it, some friend who knew them both, and suspecting that they were in love, had not dared to tell him anything about her that was of the least importance, would describe Odette's figure, as he had seen her, that very morning, going on foot up the Rue Abbattucci, in a cape trimmed with skunks, wearing a Rembrandt hat, and a bunch of violets in her bosom. This simple outline reduced Swann to utter confusion by enabling him suddenly to perceive that Odette had an existence which was not wholly subordinated to his own; he burned to know whom she had been seeking to fascinate by this costume in which he had never seen her; he registered a vow to insist upon her telling him where she had been going at that intercepted moment, as though, in all the colourless life—a life almost non-existent, since she was then invisible to him—of his mistress, there had been but a single incident apart from all those smiles directed towards himself; namely, her walking abroad beneath a Rembrandt hat, with a bunch of violets in her bosom.

Except when he asked her for Vinteuil's little phrase instead of the *Valse des Roses,* Swann made no effort to induce her to play the things that he himself preferred, nor, in literature any more than in music, to correct the manifold errors of her taste. He fully realised that she was not intelligent. When she said how much she would like him to tell her about the great poets, she had imagined that she would suddenly get to know whole pages of romantic and heroic verse, in the style of the Vicomte de Borelli, only even more moving. As for Vermeer of Delft, she asked whether he had been made to suffer by a woman, if it was a woman that had inspired him, and once Swann had told her that no one knew, she had lost all interest in that painter. She would often say: "I'm sure, poetry; well, of course, there'd be nothing like it if it was all true, if the poets really believed the things they said. But as often as not you'll find there's no one so mean and calculating as those fellows. I know something about poetry. I had a friend, once, who was in love with a poet of sorts. In his verses he never spoke of anything but love, and heaven, and the stars. Oh! she was properly taken in! He had more than three hundred thousand francs out of her before he'd finished." If, then, Swann tried to shew her in what artistic beauty consisted, how one ought to appreciate poetry or painting, after a minute or two she would cease to listen, saying: "Yes . . . I never thought it would be like that." And he felt that her disappointment was so great that he preferred to lie to her, assuring her that what he had said was nothing, that he had only touched the surface, that he had not time to go into it all properly, that there was more in it than that. Then she would interrupt with a brisk, "More in it? What? . . . Do tell me!", but he did not tell her, for he realised how petty it would appear to her, and how different from what she had expected, less sensational and less touching; he was afraid, too, lest, disillusioned in the matter of art, she might at the same time be disillusioned in the greater matter of love.

With the result that she found Swann inferior, intellectually, to what she had supposed. "You're always so reserved; I can't make you out." She marvelled increasingly at his indifference to money, at his courtesy to everyone alike, at the delicacy of his mind. And indeed it happens, often enough, to a greater man than Swann ever was, to a scientist or artist, when he is not wholly misunderstood by the people among whom he lives, that the feeling in them which proves that they have been convinced of the superiority of his intellect is created not by any admiration for his ideas—for those are entirely beyond them—but by their respect for what they term his good qualities. There was also the respect with which Odette was inspired by the thought of Swann's social position, although she had no desire that he should attempt to secure invitations for herself. Perhaps she felt that such attempts would be bound to fail; perhaps, indeed, she feared lest, merely by speaking of her to his friends, he should provoke disclosures of an unwelcome kind. The fact remains that she had consistently held him to his promise never to mention her name. Her reason for not wishing to go into society was, she had told him, a quarrel which she had had, long ago, with another girl, who had avenged herself by saying nasty things about her. "But," Swann objected, "surely, people don't all know your friend." "Yes, don't you see, it's like a spot of oil; people are so horrid." Swann was unable, frankly, to appreciate this point; on the other hand, he knew that such generalisations as "People are so horrid," and "A word of scandal spreads like a spot of oil," were generally accepted as true; there must, therefore, be cases to which they were literally applicable. Could Odette's case be one of these? He teased himself with the question, though not for long, for he too was subject to that mental oppression which had so weighed upon his father, whenever he was faced by a difficult problem. In any event, that world of society which concealed such terrors for Odette inspired her, probably, with no very great longing to enter it, since it was too far removed from the world which she already knew for her to be able to form any clear conception of it. At the same time, while in certain respects she had retained a genuine simplicity (she had, for instance, kept up a friendship with a little dressmaker, now retired from business, up whose steep and dark and fetid staircase she clambered almost every day), she still thirsted to be in the fashion, though her idea of it was not altogether that held by fashionable people. For the latter, fashion is a thing that emanates from a comparatively small number of leaders, who project it to a considerable distance—with more or less strength according as one is nearer to or farther from their intimate centre —over the widening circle of their friends and the friends of their friends, whose names form a sort of tabulated index. People 'in society' know this index by heart, they are gifted in such matters with an erudition from which they have extracted a sort of taste, of tact, so automatic in its operation that Swann, for example, without needing to draw upon his knowledge of the world, if he read in a newspaper the names of the people who had been guests at a dinner, could tell at once how fashionable the dinner had been, just as a man of letters, merely by reading a phrase, can estimate exactly the literary merit of its author. But Odette was one of those persons (an extremely numerous class, whatever the fashionable world may think, and to be found in every section of society) who do not share this knowledge, but imagine fashion to be something of quite another kind, which assumes different aspects according to the circle to which they themselves belong, but has the special characteristic—common alike to the fashion of which Odette used to dream and to that before which Mme. Cottard bowed—of being directly accessible to all. The other kind, the fashion of 'fashionable people,' is, it must be admitted, accessible also; but there are inevitable delays. Odette would say of some one: "He never goes to any place that isn't really smart."

And if Swann were to ask her what she meant by that, she would answer, with a touch of contempt, "Smart places! Why, good heavens, just fancy, at your age, having to be told what the smart places are in Paris! What do you expect me to say? Well, on Sunday mornings there's the Avenue de l'Impératrice, and round the lake at five o'clock, and on Thursdays the

Eden-Théâtre, and the Hippodrome on Fridays; then there are the balls . . ."

"What balls?"

"Why, silly, the balls people give in Paris; the smart ones, I mean. Wait now, Herbinger, you know who I mean, the fellow who's in one of the jobbers' offices; yes, of course, you must know him, he's one of the best-known men in Paris, that great big fair-haired boy who wears such swagger clothes; he always has a flower in his buttonhole and a light-coloured overcoat with a fold down the back; he goes about with that old image, takes her to all the first-nights. Very well! He gave a ball the other night, and all the smart people in Paris were there. I should have loved to go! but you had to shew your invitation at the door, and I couldn't get one anywhere. After all, I'm just as glad, now, that I didn't go; I should have been killed in the crush, and seen nothing. Still, just to be able to say one had been to Herbinger's ball. You know how vain I am! However, you may be quite certain that half the people who tell you they were there are telling stories. . . . But I am surprised that you weren't there, a regular 'tip-topper' like you."

Swann made no attempt, however, to modify this conception of fashion; feeling that his own came no nearer to the truth, was just as fatuous, devoid of all importance, he saw no advantage to be gained by imparting it to his mistress, with the result that, after a few months, she ceased to take any interest in the people to whose houses he went, except when they were the means of his obtaining tickets for the paddock at race-meetings or first-nights at the theatre. She hoped that he would continue to cultivate such profitable acquaintances, but she had come to regard them as less smart since the day when she had passed the Marquise de Villeparisis in the street, wearing a black serge dress and a bonnet with strings.

"But she looks like a pew-opener, like an old charwoman, darling! That a marquise! Goodness knows I'm not a marquise, but you'd have to pay me a lot of money before you'd get me to go about Paris rigged out like that!"

Nor could she understand Swann's continuing to live in his house on the Quai d'Orléans, which, though she dared not tell him so, she considered unworthy of him.

It was true that she claimed to be fond of 'antiques,' and used to assume a rapturous and knowing air when she confessed how she loved to spend the whole day 'rummaging' in second-hand shops, hunting for 'bric-à-brac,' and things of the 'right date.' Although it was a point of honour, to which she obstinately clung, as though obeying some old family custom, that she should never answer any questions, never give any account of what she did during the daytime, she spoke to Swann once about a friend to whose house she had been invited, and had found that everything in it was 'of the period.' Swann could not get her to tell him what 'period' it was. Only after thinking the matter over she replied that it was 'mediaeval'; by which she meant that the walls were panelled. Some time later she spoke to him again of her friend, and added, in the hesitating but confident tone in which one refers to a person whom one has met somewhere, at dinner, the night before, of whom one had never heard until then, but whom one's hosts seemed to regard as some one so celebrated and important that one hopes that one's listener will know quite well who is meant, and will be duly impressed: "Her dining-room . . . is . . . eighteenth century!" Incidentally, she had thought it hideous, all bare, as though the house were still unfinished; women looked frightful in it, and it would never become the fashion. She mentioned it again, a third time, when she shewed Swann a card with the name and address of the man who had designed the dining-room, and whom she wanted to send for, when she had enough money, to see whether he could not do one for her too; not one like that, of course, but one of the sort she used to dream of, one which, unfortunately, her little house would not be large enough to contain, with tall sideboards, Renaissance furniture and fireplaces like the Château at Blois. It was on this occasion that she let out to Swann what she really thought of his abode on the Quai d'Orléans; he having ventured the criticism that her friend had indulged, not in the Louis XVI style, for, he went on, although that was not, of course, done, still it might be made charming, but in the 'Sham-Antique.'

"You wouldn't have her live, like you, among a lot of broken-down chairs and threadbare carpets!" she exclaimed, the innate respectability of the middle-class housewife rising impulsively to the surface through the acquired dilettantism of the 'light woman.'

People who enjoyed 'picking-up' things, who admired poetry, despised sordid calculations of profit and loss, and nourished ideals of honour and love, she placed in a class by themselves, superior to the rest of humanity. There was no need actually to have those tastes, provided one talked enough about them; when a man had told her at dinner that he loved to wander about and get his hands all covered with dust in the old furniture shops, that he would never be really appreciated in this commercial age, since he was not concerned about the things that interested it, and that he belonged to another generation altogether, she would come home saying: "Why, he's an adorable creature; so sensitive! I had no idea," and she would conceive for him a strong and sudden friendship. But, on the other hand, men who, like Swann, had these tastes but did not speak of them, left her cold. She was obliged, of course, to admit that Swann was most generous with his money, but she would add, pouting: "It's not the same thing, you see, with him," and, as a matter of fact, what appealed to her imagination was not the practice of disinterestedness, but its vocabulary.

Feeling that, often, he could not give her in reality the pleasures of which she dreamed, he tried at least to ensure that she should be happy in his company, tried not to contradict those vulgar ideas, that bad taste which she displayed on every possible occasion, which all the same he loved, as he could not help loving everything that came from her, which even fascinated him, for were they not so many more of those characteristic features, by virtue of which the essential qualities of the woman emerged, and were made visible? And so, when she was in a happy mood because she was going to see the *Reine Topaze,* or when her eyes grew serious, troubled, petulant, if she was afraid of missing the flower-show, or merely of not being in time for tea, with muffins and toast, at the Rue Royale tea-rooms, where she believed that regular attendance was indispensable, and set the seal upon a woman's certificate of 'smartness,' Swann, enraptured, as all of us are, at times, by the natural behaviour of a child, or by the likeness of a portrait, which appears to be on the point of speaking, would feel so distinctly the soul of his mistress rising to fill the outlines of her face that he could not refrain from going across and welcoming it with his lips. "Oh, then, so little Odette wants us to take her to the flower-show, does she? she wants to be admired, does she? very well, we will take her there, we can but obey her wishes." As Swann's sight was beginning to fail, he had to resign himself to a pair of spectacles, which he wore at home, when working, while to face the world he adopted a single eyeglass, as being less disfiguring. The first time that she saw it in his eye, she could not contain herself for joy: "I really do think—for a man, that is to say—it is tremendously smart! How nice you look with it! Every inch a gentleman. All you want now is a title!" she concluded, with a tinge of regret in her voice. He liked Odette to say these things, just as, if he had been in love with a Breton girl, he would have enjoyed seeing her in her coif and hearing her say that she believed in ghosts. Always until then, as is common among men whose taste for the fine arts develops independently of their sensuality, a grotesque disparity had existed between the satisfactions which he would accord to either taste simultaneously; yielding to the seduction of works of art which grew more and more subtle as the women in whose company he enjoyed them grew more illiterate and common, he would take a little servant-girl to a screened box in a theatre where there was some decadent piece which he had wished to see performed, or to an exhibition of impressionist painting, with the conviction, moreover, that an educated, 'society' woman would have understood them no better, but would not have managed to keep quiet about them so prettily. But, now that he was in love with Odette, all this was changed; to share her sympathies, to strive to be one with her in spirit was a task so attractive that he tried to find satisfaction in the things that she liked, and did find a pleasure, not only in copying her habits but in adopting her opinions, which was all the deeper because, as those habits and opinions sprang from no roots in her intelligence, they suggested to him nothing except that love, for the sake of which he had preferred them to his own. If he went again to *Serge Panine,* if he looked out for opportunities of going to watch Olivier Métra conducting, it was for the pleasure of being initiated into every one of the ideas in Odette's mind, of feeling that he had an equal share in all her tastes. This charm of drawing him closer to her, which her favourite plays and pictures and places possessed, struck him as being more mysterious than the intrinsic charm of more beautiful things and places, which appealed to him by their beauty, but without recalling her. Besides, having allowed the intellectual beliefs of his youth to grow faint, until his scepticism, as a finished 'man of the world,' had gradually penetrated them unawares, he held (or at least he had held for so long that he had fallen into the habit of saying) that the objects which we admire have no absolute value in themselves, that the whole thing is a matter of dates and castes, and consists in a series of fashions, the most vulgar of which are worth just as much as those which are regarded as the most refined. And as he had decided that the importance which Odette attached to receiving cards for a private view was not in itself any more ridiculous than the pleasure which he himself had at one time felt in going to luncheon with the Prince of Wales, so he did not think that the admiration which she professed for Monte-Carlo or for the Righi was any more unreasonable than his own liking for Holland (which she imagined as ugly) and for Versailles (which bored her to tears). And so he denied himself the pleasure of visiting those places, consoling himself with the reflection that it was for her sake that he wished to feel, to like nothing that was not equally felt and liked by her.

Like everything else that formed part of Odette's environment, and was no more, in a sense, than the means whereby he might see and talk to her more often, he enjoyed the society of the Verdurins. With them, since, at the heart of all their entertainments, dinners, musical evenings, games, suppers in fancy dress, excursions to the country, theatre parties, even the infrequent 'big evenings' when they entertained 'bores,' there were the presence of Odette, the sight of Odette, conversation with Odette, an inestimable boon which the Verdurins, by inviting him to their house, bestowed on Swann, he was happier in the little 'nucleus' than anywhere else, and tried to find some genuine merit in each of its members, imagining that his tastes would lead him to frequent their society for the rest of his life. Never daring to whisper to himself, lest he should doubt the truth of the suggestion, that he would always be in love with Odette, at least when he tried to suppose that he would always go to the Verdurins' (a proposition which, *a priori,* raised fewer fundamental objections on the part of his intelligence), he saw himself for the future continuing to meet Odette every evening; that did not, perhaps, come quite to the same thing as his being permanently in love with her, but for the moment while he was in love with her, to feel that he would not, one day, cease to see her was all that he could ask. "What a charming atmosphere!" he said to himself. "How entirely genuine life is to these people! They are far more intelligent, far more artistic, surely, than the people one knows. Mme. Verdurin, in spite of a few trifling exaggerations which are rather absurd, has a sincere love of painting and music! What a passion for works of art, what anxiety to give pleasure to artists! Her ideas about some of the people one knows are not quite right, but then their ideas about artistic circles are altogether wrong! Possibly I make no great intellectual demands upon conversation, but I am perfectly happy talking to Cottard, although he does trot out those idiotic puns. And as for the painter, if he is rather unpleasantly affected when he tries to be paradoxical, still he has one of the finest brains that I have ever come across. Besides, what is most important, one feels quite free there, one does what one likes without constraint or fuss. What a flow of humour there is every day in that drawing-room! Certainly, with a few rare exceptions, I never want to go anywhere else again. It will become more and more of a habit, and I shall spend the rest of my life among them."

And as the qualities which he supposed to be an intrinsic part of the Verdurin character were no more, really, than their superficial reflection of the pleasure which had been enjoyed in their society by his love for Odette, those qualities became more serious, more profound, more vital, as that pleasure increased. Since Mme. Verdurin gave Swann, now and then, what alone could constitute his happiness; since, on an evening when he felt anxious because Odette had talked rather more to one of the party than to another, and, in a spasm of irritation, would not take the initiative by asking her whether she was coming home, Mme. Verdurin brought peace and joy to his troubled spirit by the spontaneous exclamation: "Odette! You'll see M. Swann home, won't you?"; since, when the summer holidays came, and after he had asked himself uneasily whether Odette might not leave Paris without him, whether he would still be able to see her every day, Mme. Verdurin was going to invite them both to spend the summer with her in the country; Swann, unconsciously allowing gratitude and self-interest to filter into his intelligence and to influence his ideas, went so far as to proclaim that Mme. Verdurin was "a great and noble soul." Should any of his old fellow-pupils in the Louvre school of painting speak to him of some rare or eminent artist, "I'd a hundred times rather," he would reply, "have the Verdurins." And, with a solemnity of diction which was new in him: "They are magnanimous creatures, and magnanimity is, after all, the one thing that matters, the one thing that gives us distinction here on earth. Look you, there are only two classes of men, the magnanimous, and the rest; and I have reached an age when one has to take sides, to decide once and for all whom one is going to like and dislike, to stick to the people one likes, and, to make up for the time one has wasted with the others, never to leave them again as long as one lives. Very well!" he went on, with the slight emotion which a man feels when, even without being fully aware of what he is doing, he says something, not because it is true but because he enjoys saying it, and listens to his own voice uttering the words as though they came from some one else, "The die is now cast; I have elected to love none but magnanimous souls, and to live only in an atmosphere of magnanimity. You ask me whether Mme. Verdurin is really intelligent. I can assure you that she has given me proofs of a nobility of heart, of a loftiness of soul, to which no one could possibly attain—how could they?—without a corresponding loftiness of mind. Without question, she has a profound understanding of art. But it is not, perhaps, in that that she is most admirable; every little action, ingeniously, exquisitely kind, which she has performed for my sake, every friendly attention, simple little things, quite domestic and yet quite sublime, reveal a more profound comprehension of existence than all your textbooks of philosophy."

⁂

He might have reminded himself, all the same, that there were various old friends of his family who were just as simple as the Verdurins, companions of his early days who were just as fond of art, that he knew other 'great-hearted creatures,' and that, nevertheless, since he had cast his vote in favour of simplicity, the arts, and magnanimity, he had entirely ceased to see them. But these people did not know Odette, and, if they had known her, would never have thought of introducing her to him.

And so there was probably not, in the whole of the Verdurin circle, a single one of the 'faithful' who loved them, or believed that he loved them, as dearly as did Swann. And yet, when M. Verdurin said that he was not satisfied with Swann, he had not only expressed his own sentiments, he had unwittingly discovered his wife's. Doubtless Swann had too particular an affection for Odette, as to which he had failed to take Mme. Verdurin daily into his confidence; doubtless the very discretion with which he availed himself of the Verdurins' hospitality, refraining, often, from coming to dine with them for a reason which they never suspected, and in place of which they saw only an anxiety on his part not to have to decline an invitation to the house of some 'bore' or other; doubtless, also, and despite all the precautions which he had taken to keep it from them, the gradual discovery which they were making of his brilliant position in society—doubtless all these things contributed to their general annoyance with Swann. But the real, the fundamental reason was quite different. What had happened was that they had at once discovered in him a locked door, a reserved, impenetrable chamber in which he still professed silently to himself that the Princesse de Sagan was not grotesque, and that Cottard's jokes were not amusing; in a word (and for all that he never once abandoned his friendly attitude towards them all, or revolted from their dogmas), they had discovered an impossibility of imposing those dogmas upon him, of entirely converting him to their faith, the like of which they had never come across in anyone before. They would have forgiven his going to the houses of 'bores' (to whom, as it happened, in his heart of hearts he infinitely preferred the Verdurins and all their little 'nucleus') had he consented to set a good example by openly renouncing those 'bores' in the presence of the 'faithful.' But that was an abjuration which, as they well knew, they were powerless to extort.

What a difference was there in a 'newcomer' whom Odette had asked them to invite, although she herself had met him only a few times, and on whom they were building great hopes—the Comte de Forcheville! (It turned out that he was nothing more nor less than the brother-in-law of Saniette, a discovery which filled all the 'faithful' with amazement: the manners of the old palaeographer were so humble that they had always supposed him to be of a class inferior, socially, to their own, and had never expected to learn that he came of a rich and relatively aristocratic family.) Of course, Forcheville was enormously the 'swell,' which Swann was not or had quite ceased to be; of course, he would never dream of placing, as Swann now placed, the Verdurin circle above any other. But he lacked that natural refinement which prevented Swann from associating himself with the criticisms (too obviously false to be worth his notice) that Mme. Verdurin levelled at people whom he knew. As for the vulgar and affected tirades in which the painter sometimes indulged, the bag-man's pleasantries which Cottard used to hazard,—whereas Swann, who liked both men sincerely, could easily find excuses for these without having either the courage or the hypocrisy to applaud them, Forcheville, on the other hand, was on an intellectual level which permitted him to be stupified, amazed by the invective (without in the least understanding what it all was about), and to be frankly delighted by the wit. And the very first dinner at the Verdurins' at which Forcheville was present threw a glaring light upon all the differences between them, made his qualities start into prominence and precipitated the disgrace of Swann.

There was, at this dinner, besides the usual party, a professor from the Sorbonne, one Brichot, who had met M. and Mme. Verdurin at a watering-place somewhere, and, if his duties at the university and his other works of scholarship had not left him with very little time to spare, would gladly have come to them more often. For he had that curiosity, that superstitious outlook on life, which, combined with a certain amount of scepticism with regard to the object of their studies, earn for men of intelligence, whatever their profession, for doctors who do not believe in medicine, for schoolmasters who do not believe in Latin exercises, the reputation of having broad, brilliant, and indeed superior minds. He affected, when at Mme. Verdurin's, to choose his illustrations from among the most topical subjects of the day, when he spoke of philosophy or history, principally because he regarded those sciences as no more, really, than a preparation for life itself, and imagined that he was seeing put into practice by the 'little clan' what hitherto he had known only from books; and also, perhaps, because, having had drilled into him as a boy, and having unconsciously preserved, a feeling of reverence for certain subjects, he thought that he was casting aside the scholar's gown when he ventured to treat those subjects with a conversational licence, which seemed so to him only because the folds of the gown still clung.

Early in the course of the dinner, when M. de Forcheville, seated on the right of Mme. Verdurin, who, in the 'newcomer's' honour, had taken great pains with her toilet, observed to her: "Quite original, that white dress," the Doctor, who had never taken his eyes off him, so curious was he to learn the nature and attributes of what he called a "de," and was on the look-out for an opportunity of attracting his attention, so as to come into closer contact with him, caught in its flight the adjective '*blanche*' and, his eyes still glued to his plate, snapped out, "*Blanche?* Blanche of Castile?" then, without moving his head, shot a furtive glance to right and left of him, doubtful, but happy on the whole. While Swann, by the painful and futile effort which he made to smile, testified that he thought the pun absurd, Forcheville had shewn at once that he could appreciate its subtlety, and that he was a man of the world, by keeping within its proper limits a mirth the spontaneity of which had charmed Mme. Verdurin.

"What are you to say of a scientist like that?" she asked Forcheville. "You can't talk seriously to him for two minutes on end. Is that the sort of thing you tell them at your hospital?" she went on, turning to the Doctor. "They must have some pretty lively times there, if that's the case. I can see that I shall have to get taken in as a patient!"

"I think I heard the Doctor speak of that wicked old humbug, Blanche of Castile, if I may so express myself. Am I not right, Madame?" Brichot appealed to Mme. Verdurin, who, swooning with merriment, her eyes tightly closed, had buried her face in her two hands, from between which, now and then, escaped a muffled scream.

"Good gracious, Madame, I would not dream of shocking the reverent-minded, if there are any such around this table, *sub rosa* . . . I recognise, moreover, that our ineffable and Athenian—oh, how infinitely Athenian—Republic is capable of honouring, in the person of that obscurantist old she-Capet, the first of our chiefs of police. Yes, indeed, my dear host, yes, indeed!" he repeated in his ringing voice, which sounded a separate note for each syllable, in reply to a protest by M. Verdurin. "The Chronicle of Saint Denis, and the authenticity of its information is beyond question, leaves us no room for doubt on that point. No one could be more fitly chosen as Patron by a secularising proletariat than that mother of a Saint, who let him see some pretty fishy saints besides, as Suger says, and other great St. Bernards of the sort; for with her it was a case of taking just what you pleased."

"Who is that gentleman?" Forcheville asked Mme. Verdurin. "He seems to speak with great authority."

"What! Do you mean to say you don't know the famous Brichot? Why, he's celebrated all over Europe."

"Oh, that's Bréchot, is it?" exclaimed Forcheville, who had not quite caught the name. "You must tell me all about him"; he went on, fastening a pair of goggle eyes on the celebrity. "It's always interesting to meet well-known people at dinner. But, I say, you ask us to very select parties here. No dull evenings in this house, I'm sure."

"Well, you know what it is really," said Mme. Verdurin modestly. "They feel safe here. They can talk about whatever they like, and the conversation goes off like fireworks. Now Brichot, this evening, is nothing. I've seen him, don't you know, when he's been with me, simply dazzling; you'd want to go on your knees to him. Well, with anyone else he's not the same man, he's not in the least witty, you have to drag the words out of him, he's even boring."

"That's strange," remarked Forcheville with fitting astonishment.

A sort of wit like Brichot's would have been regarded as out-and-out stupidity by the people among whom Swann had spent his early life, for all that it is quite compatible with real intelligence. And the intelligence of the Professor's vigorous and well-nourished brain might easily have been envied by many of the people in society who seemed witty enough to Swann. But these last had so thoroughly inculcated into him their likes and dislikes, at least in everything that pertained to their ordinary social existence, including that annex to social existence which belongs, strictly speaking, to the domain of intelligence, namely, conversation, that Swann could not see anything in Brichot's pleasantries; to him they were merely pedantic, vulgar, and disgustingly coarse. He was shocked, too, being accustomed to good manners, by the rude, almost barrack-room tone which this student-in-arms adopted, no matter to whom he was speaking.

Finally, perhaps, he had lost all patience that evening as he watched Mme. Verdurin welcoming, with such unnecessary warmth, this Forcheville fellow, whom it had been Odette's unaccountable idea to bring to the house. Feeling a little awkward, with Swann there also, she had asked him on her arrival: "What do you think of my guest?"

And he, suddenly realising for the first time that Forcheville, whom he had known for years, could actually attract a woman, and was quite a good specimen of a man, had retorted: "Beastly!" He had, certainly, no idea of being jealous of Odette, but did not feel quite so happy as usual, and when Brichot, having begun to tell them the story of Blanche of Castile's mother, who, according to him, "had been with Henry Plantagenet for years before they were married," tried to prompt Swann to beg him to continue the story, by interjecting "Isn't that so, M. Swann?" in the martial accents which one uses in order to get down to the level of an unintelligent rustic or to put the 'fear of God' into a trooper, Swann cut his story short, to the intense fury of their hostess, by begging to be excused for taking so little interest in Blanche of Castile, as he had something that he wished to ask the painter. He, it appeared, had been that afternoon to an exhibition of the work of another artist, also a friend of Mme. Verdurin, who had recently died, and Swann wished to find out from him (for he valued his discrimination) whether there had really been anything more in this later work than the virtuosity which had struck people so forcibly in his earlier exhibitions.

"From that point of view it was extraordinary, but it did not seem to me to be a form of art which you could call 'elevated,' " said Swann with a smile.

"Elevated . . . to the height of an Institute!" interrupted Cottard, raising his arms with mock solemnity. The whole table burst out laughing.

"What did I tell you?" said Mme. Verdurin to Forcheville. "It's simply impossible to be serious with him. When you least expect it, out he comes with a joke."

But she observed that Swann, and Swann alone, had not unbent. For one thing he was none too well pleased with Cottard for having secured a laugh at his expense in front of Forcheville. But the painter, instead of replying in a way that might have interested Swann, as he would probably have done had they been alone together, preferred to win the easy admiration of the rest by exercising his wit upon the talent of their dead friend.

"I went up to one of them," he began, "just to see how it was done; I stuck my nose into it. Yes, I don't think! Impossible to say whether it was done with glue, with soap, with sealing-wax, with sunshine, with leaven, with excrem . . ."

"And one make twelve!" shouted the Doctor, wittily, but just too late, for no one saw the point of his interruption.

"It looks as though it were done with nothing at all," resumed the painter. "No more chance of discovering the trick than there is in the 'Night Watch,' or the 'Regents,' and it's even bigger work than either Rembrandt or Hals ever did. It's all there,—and yet, no, I'll take my oath it isn't."

Then, just as singers who have reached the highest note in their compass, proceed to hum the rest of the air in falsetto, he had to be satisfied with murmuring, smiling the while, as if, after all, there had been something irresistibly amusing in the sheer beauty of the painting: "It smells all right; it makes your head go round; it catches your breath; you feel ticklish all over—and not the faintest clue to how it's done. The man's a sorcerer; the thing's a conjuring-trick, it's a miracle," bursting outright into laughter, "it's dishonest!" Then stopping, solemnly raising his head, pitching his voice on a double-bass note which he struggled to bring into harmony, he concluded, "And it's so loyal!"

Except at the moment when he had called it "bigger than the 'Night Watch,' " a blasphemy which had called forth an instant protest from Mme. Verdurin, who regarded the 'Night Watch' as the supreme masterpiece of the universe (conjointly with the 'Ninth' and the 'Samothrace'), and at the word "excrement," which had made Forcheville throw a sweeping glance round the table to see whether it was 'all right,' before he allowed his lips to curve in a prudish and conciliatory smile, all the party (save Swann) had kept their fascinated and adoring eyes fixed upon the painter.

"I do so love him when he goes up in the air like that!" cried Mme. Verdurin, the moment that he had finished, enraptured that the table-talk should have proved so entertaining on the very night that Forcheville was dining with them for the first time. "Hallo, you!" she turned to her husband, "what's the matter with you, sitting there gaping like a great animal? You know, though, don't you," she apologised for him to the painter, "that he can talk quite well when he chooses; anybody would think it was the first time he had ever listened to you. If you had only seen him while you were speaking; he was just drinking it all in. And to-morrow he will tell us everything you said, without missing a word."

"No, really, I'm not joking!" protested the painter, enchanted by the success of his speech. "You all look as if you thought I was pulling your legs, that it was just a trick. I'll take you to see the show, and then you can say whether I've been exaggerating; I'll bet you anything you like, you'll come away more 'up in the air' than I am!"

"But we don't suppose for a moment that you're exaggerating; we only want you to go on with your dinner, and my husband too. Give M. Biche some more sole, can't you see his has got cold? We're not in any hurry; you're dashing round as if the house was on fire. Wait a little; don't serve the salad just yet."

Mme. Cottard, who was a shy woman and spoke but seldom, was not lacking, for all that, in self-assurance when a happy inspiration put the right word in her mouth. She felt that it would be well received; the thought gave her confidence, and what she was doing was done with the object not so much of shining herself, as of helping her husband on in his career. And so she did not allow the word 'salad,' which Mme. Verdurin had just uttered, to pass unchallenged.

"It's not a Japanese salad, is it?" she whispered, turning towards Odette.

And then, in her joy and confusion at the combination of neatness and daring which there had been in making so discreet and yet so unmistakable an allusion to the new and brilliantly successful play by Dumas, she broke down in a charming, girlish laugh, not very loud, but so irresistible that it was some time before she could control it.

"Who is that lady? She seems devilish clever," said Forcheville.

"No, it is not. But we will have one for you if you will all come to dinner on Friday."

"You will think me dreadfully provincial, sir," said Mme. Cottard to Swann, "but, do you know, I haven't been yet to this famous *Francillon* that everybody's talking about. The Doctor has been (I remember now, he told me what a very great pleasure it had been to him to spend the evening with you there) and I must confess, I don't see much sense in spending money on seats for him to take me, when he's seen the play already. Of course an evening at the Théâtre-Français is never wasted, really; the acting's so good there always; but we have some very nice friends," (Mme. Cottard would hardly ever utter a proper name, but restricted herself to "some friends of ours" or "one of my friends," as being more 'distinguished,' speaking in an affected tone and with all the importance of a person who need give names only when she chooses) "who often have a box, and are kind enough to take us to all the new pieces that are worth going to, and so I'm certain to see this *Francillon* sooner or later, and then I shall know what to think. But I do feel such a fool about it, I must confess, for, whenever I pay a call anywhere, I find everybody talking—it's only natural—about that wretched Japanese salad. Really and truly, one's beginning to get just a little tired of hearing about it," she went on, seeing that Swann seemed less interested than she had hoped in so burning a topic. "I must admit, though, that it's sometimes quite amusing, the way they joke about it: I've got a friend, now, who is most original, though she's really a beautiful woman, most popular in society, goes everywhere, and she tells me that she got her cook to make one of these Japanese salads, putting in everything that young M. Dumas says you're to put in, in the play. Then she asked just a few friends to come and taste it. I was not among the favoured few, I'm sorry to say. But she told us all about it on her next 'day'; it seems it was quite horrible, she made us all laugh till we cried. I don't know; perhaps it was the way she told it," Mme. Cottard added doubtfully, seeing that Swann still looked grave.

And, imagining that it was, perhaps, because he had not been amused by *Francillon:* "Well, I daresay I shall be disappointed with it, after all. I don't suppose it's as good as the piece Mme. de Crécy worships, *Serge Panine*. There's a play, if you like; so deep, makes you think! But just fancy giving a receipt for a salad on the stage of the Théâtre-Français! Now, *Serge Panine*—! But then, it's like everything that comes from the pen of M. Georges Ohnet, it's so well written. I wonder if you know the *Maître des Forges,* which I like even better than *Serge Panine*."

"Pardon me," said Swann with polite irony, "but I can assure you that my want of admiration is almost equally divided between those masterpieces."

"Really, now; that's very interesting. And what don't you like about them? Won't you ever change your mind? Perhaps you think he's a little too sad. Well, well, what I always say is, one should never argue about plays or novels. Everyone has his own way of looking at things, and what may be horrible to you is, perhaps, just what I like best."

She was interrupted by Forcheville's addressing Swann. What had happened was that, while Mme. Cottard was discussing *Francillon,* Forcheville had been expressing to Mme. Verdurin his admiration for what he called the "little speech" of the painter. "Your friend has such a flow of language, such a memory!" he had said to her when the painter had come to a standstill, "I've seldom seen anything like it. He'd make a first-rate preacher. By Jove, I wish I was like that. What with him and M. Bréchot you've drawn two lucky numbers to-night; though I'm not so sure that, simply as a speaker, this one doesn't knock spots off the Professor. It comes more naturally with him, less like reading from a book. Of course, the way he goes on, he does use some words that are a bit realistic, and all that; but that's quite the thing nowadays; anyhow, it's not often I've seen a man hold the floor as cleverly as that, 'hold the spittoon,' as we used to say in the regiment, where, by the way, we had a man he rather reminds me of. You could take anything you liked—I don't know what—this glass, say; and he'd talk away about it for hours; no, not this glass; that's a silly thing to say, I'm sorry; but something a little bigger, like the battle of Waterloo, or anything of that sort, he'd tell you things you simply wouldn't believe. Why, Swann was in the regiment then; he must have known him."

"Do you see much of M. Swann?" asked Mme. Verdurin.

"Oh dear, no!" he answered, and then, thinking that if he made himself pleasant to Swann he might find favour with Odette, he decided to take this opportunity of flattering him by speaking of his fashionable friends, but speaking as a man of the world himself, in a tone of good-natured criticism, and not as though he were congratulating Swann upon some undeserved good fortune: "Isn't that so, Swann? I never see anything of you, do I?—But then, where on earth is one to see him? The creature spends all his time shut up with the La Trémoïlles, with the Laumes and all that lot!" The imputation would have been false at any time, and was all the more so, now that for at least a year Swann had given up going to almost any house but the Verdurins'. But the mere names of families whom the Verdurins did not know were received by them in a reproachful silence. M. Verdurin, dreading the painful impression which the mention of these 'bores,' especially when flung at her in this tactless fashion, and in front of all the 'faithful,' was bound to make on his wife, cast a covert glance at her, instinct with anxious solicitude. He saw then that in her fixed resolution to take no notice, to have escaped contact, altogether, with the news which had just been addressed to her, not merely to remain dumb but to have been deaf as well, as we pretend to be when a friend who has been in the wrong attempts to slip into his conversation some excuse which we should appear to be accepting, should we appear to have heard it without protesting, or when some one utters the name of an enemy, the very mention of whom in our presence is forbidden; Mme. Verdurin, so that her silence should have the appearance, not of consent but of the unconscious silence which inanimate objects preserve, had suddenly emptied her face of all life, of all mobility; her rounded forehead was nothing, now, but an exquisite study in high relief, which the name of those La Trémoïlles, with whom Swann was always 'shut up,' had failed to penetrate; her nose, just perceptibly wrinkled in a frown, exposed to view two dark cavities that were, surely, modelled from life. You would have said that her half-opened lips were just about to speak. It was all no more, however, than a wax cast, a mask in plaster, the sculptor's design for a monument, a bust to be exhibited in the Palace of Industry, where the public would most certainly gather in front of it and marvel to see how the sculptor, in expressing the unchallengeable dignity of the Verdurins, as opposed to that of the La Trémoïlles or Laumes, whose equals (if not, indeed, their betters) they were, and the equals and betters of all other 'bores' upon the face of the earth, had managed to invest with a majesty that was almost Papal the whiteness and rigidity of his stone. But the marble at last grew animated and let it be understood that it didn't do to be at all squeamish if one went to that house, since the woman was always tipsy and the husband so uneducated that he called a corridor a 'collidor'!

"You'd need to pay me a lot of money before I'd let any of that lot set foot inside my house," Mme. Verdurin concluded, gazing imperially down on Swann.

She could scarcely have expected him to capitulate so completely as to echo the holy simplicity of the pianist's aunt, who at once exclaimed: "To think of that, now! What surprises me is that they can get anybody to go near them; I'm sure I should be afraid; one can't be too careful. How can people be so common as to go running after them?"

But he might, at least, have replied, like Forcheville: "Gad, she's a duchess; there are still plenty of people who are impressed by that sort of thing," which would at least have permitted Mme. Verdurin the final retort, "And a lot of good may it do them!" Instead of which, Swann merely smiled, in a manner which shewed, quite clearly, that he could not, of course, take such an absurd suggestion seriously. M. Verdurin, who was still casting furtive and intermittent glances at his wife, could see with regret, and could understand only too well that she was now inflamed with the passion of a Grand Inquisitor who cannot succeed in stamping out a heresy; and so, in the hope of bringing Swann round to a retractation (for the courage of one's opinions is always a form of calculating cowardice in the eyes of the 'other side'), he broke in:

"Tell us frankly, now, what you think of them yourself. We shan't repeat it to them, you may be sure."

To which Swann answered: "Why, I'm not in the least afraid of the Duchess (if it is of the La Trémoïlles that you're speaking). I can assure you that everyone likes going to see her. I don't go so far as to say that she's at all 'deep'—" he pronounced the word as if it meant something ridiculous, for his speech kept the traces of certain mental habits which the recent change in his life, a rejuvenation illustrated by his passion for music, had inclined him temporarily to discard, so that at times he would actually state his views with considerable warmth—"but I am quite sincere when I say that she is intelligent, while her husband is positively a bookworm. They are charming people."

His explanation was terribly effective; Mme. Verdurin now realised that this one state of unbelief would prevent her 'little nucleus' from ever attaining to complete unanimity, and was unable to restrain herself, in her fury at the obstinacy of this wretch who could not see what anguish his words were causing her, but cried aloud, from the depths of her tortured heart, "You may think so if you wish, but at least you need not say so to us."

"It all depends upon what you call intelligence." Forcheville felt that it was his turn to be brilliant. "Come now, Swann, tell us what you mean by intelligence."

"There," cried Odette, "that's one of the big things I beg him to tell me about, and he never will."

"Oh, but . . ." protested Swann.

"Oh, but nonsense!" said Odette.

"A water-butt?" asked the Doctor.

"To you," pursued Forcheville, "does intelligence mean what they call clever talk; you know, the sort of people who worm their way into society?"

"Finish your sweet, so that they can take your plate away!" said Mme. Verdurin sourly to Saniette, who was lost in thought and had stopped eating. And then, perhaps a little ashamed of her rudeness, "It doesn't matter; take your time about it; there's no hurry; I only reminded you because of the others, you know; it keeps the servants back."

"There is," began Brichot, with a resonant smack upon every syllable, "a rather curious definition of intelligence by that pleasing old anarchist Fénelon . . ."

"Just listen to this!" Mme. Verdurin rallied Forcheville and the Doctor. "He's going to give us Fénelon's definition of intelligence. That's interesting. It's not often you get a chance of hearing that!"

But Brichot was keeping Fénelon's definition until Swann should have given his own. Swann remained silent, and, by this fresh act of recreancy, spoiled the brilliant tournament of dialectic which Mme. Verdurin was rejoicing at being able to offer to Forcheville.

"You see, it's just the same as with me!" Odette was peevish. "I'm not at all sorry to see that I'm not the only one he doesn't find quite up to his level."

"These de La Trémouailles whom Mme. Verdurin has exhibited to us as so little to be desired," inquired Brichot, articulating vigorously, "are they, by any chance, descended from the couple whom that worthy old snob, Sévigné, said she was delighted to know, because it was so good for her peasants? True, the Marquise had another reason, which in her case probably came first, for she was a thorough journalist at heart, and always on the look-out for 'copy.' And, in the journal which she used to send regularly to her daughter, it was Mme. de La Trémouaille, kept well-informed through all her grand connections, who supplied the foreign politics."

"Oh dear, no. I'm quite sure they aren't the same family," said Mme. Verdurin desperately.

Saniette who, ever since he had surrendered his untouched plate to the butler, had been plunged once more in silent meditation, emerged finally to tell them, with a nervous laugh, a story of how he had once dined with the Duc de La Trémoïlle, the point of which was that the Duke did not know that George Sand was the pseudonym of a woman. Swann, who really liked Saniette, felt bound to supply him with a few facts illustrative of the Duke's culture, which would prove that such ignorance on his part was literally impossible; but suddenly he stopped short; he had realised, as he was speaking, that Saniette needed no proof, but knew already that the story was untrue for the simple reason that he had at that moment invented it. The worthy man suffered acutely from the Verdurins' always finding him so dull; and as he was conscious of having been more than ordinarily morose this evening, he had made up his mind that he would succeed in being amusing, at least once, before the end of dinner. He surrendered so quickly, looked so wretched at the sight of his castle in ruins, and replied in so craven a tone to Swann, appealing to him not to persist in a refutation which was already superfluous, "All right; all right; anyhow, even if I have made a mistake that's not a crime, I hope," that Swann longed to be able to console him by insisting that the story was indubitably true and exquisitely funny. The Doctor, who had been listening, had an idea that it was the right moment to interject *"Se non è vero,"* but he was not quite certain of the words, and was afraid of being caught out.

After dinner, Forcheville went up to the Doctor. "She can't have been at all bad looking, Mme. Verdurin; anyhow, she's a woman you can really talk to; that's all I want. Of course she's getting a bit broad in the beam. But Mme. de Crécy! There's a little woman who knows what's what, all right. Upon my word and soul, you can see at a glance she's got the American eye, that girl has. We are speaking of Mme. de Crécy," he explained, as M. Verdurin joined them, his pipe in his mouth. "I should say that, as a specimen of the female form—"

"I'd rather have it in my bed than a clap of thunder!" the words came tumbling from Cottard, who had for some time been waiting in vain until Forcheville should pause for breath, so that he might get in his hoary old joke, a chance for which might not, he feared, come again, if the conversation should take a different turn; and he produced it now with that excessive spontaneity and confidence which may often be noticed attempting to cover up the coldness, and the slight flutter of emotion, inseparable from a prepared recitation. Forcheville knew and saw the joke, and was thoroughly amused. As for M. Verdurin, he was unsparing of his merriment, having recently discovered a way of expressing it by a symbol, different from his wife's, but equally simple and obvious. Scarcely had he begun the movement of head and shoulders of a man who was 'shaking with laughter' than he would begin also to cough, as though, in laughing too violently, he had swallowed a mouthful of smoke from his pipe. And by keeping the pipe firmly in his mouth he could prolong indefinitely the dumb-show of suffocation and hilarity. So he and Mme. Verdurin (who, at the other side of the room, where the painter was telling her a story, was shutting her eyes preparatory to flinging her face into her hands) resembled two masks in a theatre, each representing Comedy, but in a different way.

M. Verdurin had been wiser than he knew in not taking his pipe out of his mouth, for Cottard, having occasion to leave the room for a moment, murmured a witty euphemism which he had recently acquired and repeated now whenever he had to go to the place in question: "I must just go and see the Duc d'Aumale for a minute," so drolly, that M. Verdurin's cough began all over again.

"Now, then, take your pipe out of your mouth; can't you see, you'll choke if you try to bottle up your laughter like that," counselled Mme. Verdurin, as she came round with a tray of liqueurs.

"What a delightful man your husband is; he has the wit of a dozen!" declared Forcheville to Mme. Cottard. "Thank you, thank you, an old soldier like me can never say 'No' to a drink."

"M. de Forcheville thinks Odette charming," M. Verdurin told his wife.

"Why, do you know, she wants so much to meet you again some day at luncheon. We must arrange it, but don't on any account let Swann hear about it. He spoils everything, don't you know. I don't mean to say that you're not to come to dinner too, of course; we hope to see you very often. Now that the warm weather's coming, we're going to have dinner out of doors whenever we can. That won't bore you, will it, a quiet little dinner, now and then, in the Bois? Splendid, splendid, that will be quite delightful. . . .

"Aren't you going to do any work this evening, I say?" she screamed suddenly to the little pianist, seeing an opportunity for displaying, before a 'newcomer' of Forcheville's importance, at once her unfailing wit and her despotic power over the 'faithful.'

"M. de Forcheville was just going to say something dreadful about you," Mme. Cottard warned her husband as he reappeared in the room. And he, still following up the idea of Forcheville's noble birth, which had obsessed him all through dinner, began again with: "I am treating a Baroness just now, Baroness Putbus; weren't there some Putbuses in the Crusades? Anyhow they've got a lake in Pomerania that's ten times the size of the Place de la Concorde. I am treating her for dry arthritis; she's a charming woman. Mme. Verdurin knows her too, I believe."

Which enabled Forcheville, a moment later, finding himself alone with Mme. Cottard, to complete his favourable verdict on her husband with: "He's an interesting man, too; you can see that he knows some good people. Gad! but they get to know a lot of things, those doctors."

"D'you want me to play the phrase from the sonata for M. Swann?" asked the pianist.

"What the devil's that? Not the sonata-snake, I hope!" shouted M. de Forcheville, hoping to create an effect. But Dr. Cottard, who had never heard this pun, missed the point of it, and imagined that M. de Forcheville had made a mistake. He dashed in boldly to correct it: "No, no. The word isn't *serpent-à-sonates*, it's *serpent-à-sonnettes*!" he explained in a tone at once zealous, impatient, and triumphant.

Forcheville explained the joke to him. The Doctor blushed.

"You'll admit it's not bad, eh, Doctor?"

"Oh! I've known it for ages."

Then they were silenced; heralded by the waving *tremolo* of the violin-part, which formed a bristling bodyguard of sound two octaves above it—and as in a mountainous country, against the seeming immobility of a vertically falling torrent, one may distinguish, two hundred feet below, the tiny form of a woman walking in the valley—the little phrase had just appeared, distant but graceful, protected by the long, gradual unfurling of its transparent, incessant and sonorous curtain. And Swann, in his heart of hearts, turned to it, spoke to it as to a confidant in the secret of his love, as to a friend of Odette who would assure him that he need pay no attention to this Forcheville.

"Ah! you've come too late!" Mme. Verdurin greeted one of the 'faithful,' whose invitation had been only 'to look in after dinner,' "we've been having a simply incomparable Brichot! You never heard such eloquence! But he's gone. Isn't that so, M. Swann? I believe it's the first time you've met him," she went on, to emphasize the fact that it was to her that Swann owed the introduction. "Isn't that so; wasn't he delicious, our Brichot?"

Swann bowed politely.

"No? You weren't interested?" she asked dryly.

"Oh, but I assure you, I was quite enthralled. He is perhaps a little too peremptory, a little too jovial for my taste. I should like to see him a little less confident at times, a little more tolerant, but one feels that he knows a great deal, and on the whole he seems a very sound fellow."

The party broke up very late. Cottard's first words to his wife were: "I have rarely seen Mme. Verdurin in such form as she was to-night."

"What exactly is your Mme. Verdurin? A bit of a bad hat, eh?" said Forcheville to the painter, to whom he had offered a 'lift.' Odette watched his departure with regret; she dared not refuse to let Swann take her home, but she was moody and irritable in the carriage, and, when he asked whether he might come in, replied, "I suppose so," with an impatient shrug of her shoulders. When they had all gone, Mme. Verdurin said to her husband: "Did you notice the way Swann laughed, such an idiotic laugh, when we spoke about Mme. La Trémoïlle?"

She had remarked, more than once, how Swann and Forcheville suppressed the particle 'de' before that lady's name. Never doubting that it was done on purpose, to shew that they were not afraid of a title, she had made up her mind to imitate their arrogance, but had not quite grasped what grammatical form it ought to take. Moreover, the natural corruptness of her speech overcoming her implacable republicanism, she still said instinctively "the de La Trémoïlles," or, rather (by an abbreviation sanctified by the usage of music-hall singers and the writers of the 'captions' beneath caricatures, who elide the 'de'), "the d'La Trémoïlles," but she corrected herself at once to "Madame La Trémoïlle.—The *Duchess*, as Swann calls her," she added ironically, with a smile which proved that she was merely quoting, and would not, herself, accept the least responsibility for a classification so puerile and absurd.

"I don't mind saying that I thought him extremely stupid."

M. Verdurin took it up. "He's not sincere. He's a crafty customer, always hovering between one side and the other. He's always trying to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. What a difference between him and Forcheville. There, at least, you have a man who tells you straight out what he thinks. Either you agree with him or you don't. Not like the other fellow, who's never definitely fish or fowl. Did you notice, by the way, that Odette seemed all out for Forcheville, and I don't blame her, either. And then, after all, if Swann tries to come the man of fashion over us, the champion of distressed Duchesses, at any rate the other man has got a title; he's always Comte de Forcheville!" he let the words slip delicately from his lips, as though, familiar with every page of the history of that dignity, he were making a scrupulously exact estimate of its value, in relation to others of the sort.

"I don't mind saying," Mme. Verdurin went on, "that he saw fit to utter some most venomous, and quite absurd insinuations against Brichot. Naturally, once he saw that Brichot was popular in this house, it was a way of hitting back at us, of spoiling our party. I know his sort, the dear, good friend of the family, who pulls you all to pieces on the stairs as he's going away."

"Didn't I say so?" retorted her husband. "He's simply a failure; a poor little wretch who goes through life mad with jealousy of anything that's at all big."

Had the truth been known, there was not one of the 'faithful' who was not infinitely more malicious than Swann; but the others would all take the precaution of tempering their malice with obvious pleasantries, with little sparks of emotion and cordiality; while the least indication of reserve on Swann's part, undraped in any such conventional formula as "Of course, I don't want to say anything—" to which he would have scorned to descend, appeared to them a deliberate act of treachery. There are certain original and distinguished authors in whom the least 'freedom of speech' is thought revolting because they have not begun by flattering the public taste, and serving up to it the commonplace expressions to which it is used; it was by the same process that Swann infuriated M. Verdurin. In his case as in theirs it was the novelty of his language which led his audience to suspect the blackness of his designs.

Swann was still unconscious of the disgrace that threatened him at the Verdurins', and continued to regard all their absurdities in the most rosy light, through the admiring eyes of love.

As a rule he made no appointments with Odette except for the evenings; he was afraid of her growing tired of him if he visited her during the day as well; at the same time he was reluctant to forfeit, even for an hour, the place that he held in her thoughts, and so was constantly looking out for an opportunity of claiming her attention, in any way that would not be displeasing to her. If, in a florist's or a jeweller's window, a plant or an ornament caught his eye, he would at once think of sending them to Odette, imagining that the pleasure which the casual sight of them had given him would instinctively be felt, also, by her, and would increase her affection for himself; and he would order them to be taken at once to the Rue La Pérouse, so as to accelerate the moment in which, as she received an offering from him, he might feel himself, in a sense, transported into her presence. He was particularly anxious, always, that she should receive these presents before she went out for the evening, so that her sense of gratitude towards him might give additional tenderness to her welcome when he arrived at the Verdurins', might even—for all he knew—if the shopkeeper made haste, bring him a letter from her before dinner, or herself, in person, upon his doorstep, come on a little extraordinary visit of thanks. As in an earlier phase, when he had experimented with the reflex action of anger and contempt upon her character, he sought now by that of gratification to elicit from her fresh particles of her intimate feelings, which she had never yet revealed.

Often she was embarrassed by lack of money, and under pressure from a creditor would come to him for assistance. He enjoyed this, as he enjoyed everything which could impress Odette with his love for herself, or merely with his influence, with the extent of the use that she might make of him. Probably if anyone had said to him, at the beginning, "It's your position that attracts her," or at this stage, "It's your money that she's really in love with," he would not have believed the suggestion, nor would he have been greatly distressed by the thought that people supposed her to be attached to him, that people felt them to be united by any ties so binding as those of snobbishness or wealth. But even if he had accepted the possibility, it might not have caused him any suffering to discover that Odette's love for him was based on a foundation more lasting than mere affection, or any attractive qualities which she might have found in him; on a sound, commercial interest; an interest which would postpone for ever the fatal day on which she might be tempted to bring their relations to an end. For the moment, while he lavished presents upon her, and performed all manner of services, he could rely on advantages not contained in his person, or in his intellect, could forego the endless, killing effort to make himself attractive. And this delight in being a lover, in living by love alone, of the reality of which he was inclined to be doubtful, the price which, in the long run, he must pay for it, as a dilettante in immaterial sensations, enhanced its value in his eyes—as one sees people who are doubtful whether the sight of the sea and the sound of its waves are really enjoyable, become convinced that they are, as also of the rare quality and absolute detachment of their own taste, when they have agreed to pay several pounds a day for a room in an hotel, from which that sight and that sound may be enjoyed.

One day, when reflections of this order had brought him once again to the memory of the time when some one had spoken to him of Odette as of a 'kept' woman, and when, once again, he had amused himself with contrasting that strange personification, the 'kept' woman—an iridescent mixture of unknown and demoniacal qualities, embroidered, as in some fantasy of Gustave Moreau, with poison-dripping flowers, interwoven with precious jewels—with that Odette upon whose face he had watched the passage of the same expressions of pity for a sufferer, resentment of an act of injustice, gratitude for an act of kindness, which he had seen, in earlier days, on his own mother's face, and on the faces of friends; that Odette, whose conversation had so frequently turned on the things that he himself knew better than anyone, his collections, his room, his old servant, his banker, who kept all his title-deeds and bonds;—the thought of the banker reminded him that he must call on him shortly, to draw some money. And indeed, if, during the current month, he were to come less liberally to the aid of Odette in her financial difficulties than in the month before, when he had given her five thousand francs, if he refrained from offering her a diamond necklace for which she longed, he would be allowing her admiration for his generosity to decline, that gratitude which had made him so happy, and would even be running the risk of her imagining that his love for her (as she saw its visible manifestations grow fewer) had itself diminished. And then, suddenly, he asked himself whether that was not precisely what was implied by 'keeping' a woman (as if, in fact, that idea of 'keeping' could be derived from elements not at all mysterious nor perverse, but belonging to the intimate routine of his daily life, such as that thousand-franc note, a familiar and domestic object, torn in places and mended with gummed paper, which his valet, after paying the household accounts and the rent, had locked up in a drawer in the old writing-desk whence he had extracted it to send it, with four others, to Odette) and whether it was not possible to apply to Odette, since he had known her (for he never imagined for a moment that she could ever have taken a penny from anyone else, before), that title, which he had believed so wholly inapplicable to her, of 'kept' woman. He could not explore the idea further, for a sudden access of that mental lethargy which was, with him, congenital, intermittent and providential, happened, at that moment, to extinguish every particle of light in his brain, as instantaneously as, at a later period, when electric lighting had been everywhere installed, it became possible, merely by fingering a switch, to cut off all the supply of light from a house. His mind fumbled, for a moment, in the darkness, he took off his spectacles, wiped the glasses, passed his hands over his eyes, but saw no light until he found himself face to face with a wholly different idea, the realisation that he must endeavour, in the coming month, to send Odette six or seven thousand-franc notes instead of five, simply as a surprise for her and to give her pleasure.

In the evening, when he did not stay at home until it was time to meet Odette at the Verdurins', or rather at one of the open-air restaurants which they liked to frequent in the Bois and especially at Saint-Cloud, he would go to dine in one of those fashionable houses in which, at one time, he had been a constant guest. He did not wish to lose touch with people who, for all that he knew, might be of use, some day, to Odette, and thanks to whom he was often, in the meantime, able to procure for her some privilege or pleasure. Besides, he had been used for so long to the refinement and comfort of good society that, side by side with his contempt, there had grown up also a desperate need for it, with the result that, when he had reached the point after which the humblest lodgings appeared to him as precisely on a par with the most princely mansions, his senses were so thoroughly accustomed to the latter that he could not enter the former without a feeling of acute discomfort. He had the same regard—to a degree of identity which they would never have suspected—for the little families with small incomes who asked him to dances in their flats ("straight upstairs to the fifth floor, and the door on the left") as for the Princesse de Parme, who gave the most splendid parties in Paris; but he had not the feeling of being actually 'at the ball' when he found himself herded with the fathers of families in the bedroom of the lady of the house, while the spectacle of wash-hand-stands covered over with towels, and of beds converted into cloak-rooms, with a mass of hats and great-coats sprawling over their counterpanes, gave him the same stifling sensation that, nowadays, people who have been used for half a lifetime to electric light derive from a smoking lamp or a candle that needs to be snuffed. If he were dining out, he would order his carriage for half-past seven; while he changed his clothes, he would be wondering, all the time, about Odette, and in this way was never alone, for the constant thought of Odette gave to the moments in which he was separated from her the same peculiar charm as to those in which she was at his side. He would get into his carriage and drive off, but he knew that this thought had jumped in after him and had settled down upon his knee, like a pet animal which he might take everywhere, and would keep with him at the dinner-table, unobserved by his fellow-guests. He would stroke and fondle it, warm himself with it, and, as a feeling of languor swept over him, would give way to a slight shuddering movement which contracted his throat and nostrils—a new experience, this,—as he fastened the bunch of columbines in his buttonhole. He had for some time been feeling neither well nor happy, especially since Odette had brought Forcheville to the Verdurins', and he would have liked to go away for a while to rest in the country. But he could never summon up courage to leave Paris, even for a day, while Odette was there. The weather was warm; it was the finest part of the spring. And for all that he was driving through a city of stone to immure himself in a house without grass or garden, what was incessantly before his eyes was a park which he owned, near Combray, where, at four in the afternoon, before coming to the asparagus-bed, thanks to the breeze that was wafted across the fields from Méséglise, he could enjoy the fragrant coolness of the air as well beneath an arbour of hornbeams in the garden as by the bank of the pond, fringed with forget-me-not and iris; and where, when he sat down to dinner, trained and twined by the gardener's skilful hand, there ran all about his table currant-bush and rose.

After dinner, if he had an early appointment in the Bois or at Saint-Cloud, he would rise from table and leave the house so abruptly—especially if it threatened to rain, and so to scatter the 'faithful' before their normal time—that on one occasion the Princesse des Laumes (at whose house dinner had been so late that Swann had left before the coffee came in, to join the Verdurins on the Island in the Bois) observed:

"Really, if Swann were thirty years older, and had diabetes, there might be some excuse for his running away like that. He seems to look upon us all as a joke."

He persuaded himself that the spring-time charm, which he could not go down to Combray to enjoy, he would find at least on the Ile des Cygnes or at Saint-Cloud. But as he could think only of Odette, he would return home not knowing even if he had tasted the fragrance of the young leaves, or if the moon had been shining. He would be welcomed by the little phrase from the sonata, played in the garden on the restaurant piano. If there was none in the garden, the Verdurins would have taken immense pains to have a piano brought out either from a private room or from the restaurant itself; not because Swann was now restored to favour; far from it. But the idea of arranging an ingenious form of entertainment for some one, even for some one whom they disliked, would stimulate them, during the time spent in its preparation, to a momentary sense of cordiality and affection. Now and then he would remind himself that another fine spring evening was drawing to a close, and would force himself to notice the trees and the sky. But the state of excitement into which Odette's presence never failed to throw him, added to a feverish ailment which, for some time now, had scarcely left him, robbed him of that sense of quiet and comfort which is an indispensable background to the impressions that we derive from nature.

One evening, when Swann had consented to dine with the Verdurins, and had mentioned during dinner that he had to attend, next day, the annual banquet of an old comrades' association, Odette had at once exclaimed across the table, in front of everyone, in front of Forcheville, who was now one of the 'faithful,' in front of the painter, in front of Cottard:

"Yes, I know, you have your banquet to-morrow; I sha'n't see you, then, till I get home; don't be too late."

And although Swann had never yet taken offence, at all seriously, at Odette's demonstrations of friendship for one or other of the 'faithful,' he felt an exquisite pleasure on hearing her thus avow, before them all, with that calm immodesty, the fact that they saw each other regularly every evening, his privileged position in her house, and her own preference for him which it implied. It was true that Swann had often reflected that Odette was in no way a remarkable woman; and in the supremacy which he wielded over a creature so distinctly inferior to himself there was nothing that especially flattered him when he heard it proclaimed to all the 'faithful'; but since he had observed that, to several other men than himself, Odette seemed a fascinating and desirable woman, the attraction which her body held for him had aroused a painful longing to secure the absolute mastery of even the tiniest particles of her heart. And he had begun to attach an incalculable value to those moments passed in her house in the evenings, when he held her upon his knee, made her tell him what she thought about this or that, and counted over that treasure to which, alone of all his earthly possessions, he still clung. And so, after this dinner, drawing her aside, he took care to thank her effusively, seeking to indicate to her by the extent of his gratitude the corresponding intensity of the pleasures which it was in her power to bestow on him, the supreme pleasure being to guarantee him immunity, for as long as his love should last and he remain vulnerable, from the assaults of jealousy.

When he came away from his banquet, the next evening, it was pouring rain, and he had nothing but his victoria. A friend offered to take him home in a closed carriage, and as Odette, by the fact of her having invited him to come, had given him an assurance that she was expecting no one else, he could, with a quiet mind and an untroubled heart, rather than set off thus in the rain, have gone home and to bed. But perhaps, if she saw that he seemed not to adhere to his resolution to end every evening, without exception, in her company, she might grow careless, and fail to keep free for him just the one evening on which he particularly desired it.

It was after eleven when he reached her door, and as he made his apology for having been unable to come away earlier, she complained that it was indeed very late; the storm had made her unwell, her head ached, and she warned him that she would not let him stay longer than half an hour, that at midnight she would send him away; a little while later she felt tired and wished to sleep.

"No cattleya, then, to-night?" he asked, "and I've been looking forward so to a nice little cattleya."

But she was irresponsive; saying nervously: "No, dear, no cattleya to-night. Can't you see, I'm not well?"

"It might have done you good, but I won't bother you."

She begged him to put out the light before he went; he drew the curtains close round her bed and left her. But, when he was in his own house again, the idea suddenly struck him that, perhaps, Odette was expecting some one else that evening, that she had merely pretended to be tired, that she had asked him to put the light out only so that he should suppose that she was going to sleep, that the moment he had left the house she had lighted it again, and had reopened her door to the stranger who was to be her guest for the night. He looked at his watch. It was about an hour and a half since he had left her; he went out, took a cab, and stopped it close to her house, in a little street running at right angles to that other street, which lay at the back of her house, and along which he used to go, sometimes, to tap upon her bedroom window, for her to let him in. He left his cab; the streets were all deserted and dark; he walked a few yards and came out almost opposite her house. Amid the glimmering blackness of all the row of windows, the lights in which had long since been put out, he saw one, and only one, from which overflowed, between the slats of its shutters, closed like a wine-press over its mysterious golden juice, the light that filled the room within, a light which on so many evenings, as soon as he saw it, far off, as he turned into the street, had rejoiced his heart with its message: "She is there—expecting you," and now tortured him with: "She is there with the man she was expecting." He must know who; he tiptoed along by the wall until he reached the window, but between the slanting bars of the shutters he could see nothing; he could hear, only, in the silence of the night, the murmur of conversation. What agony he suffered as he watched that light, in whose golden atmosphere were moving, behind the closed sash, the unseen and detested pair, as he listened to that murmur which revealed the presence of the man who had crept in after his own departure, the perfidy of Odette, and the pleasures which she was at that moment tasting with the stranger.

And yet he was not sorry that he had come; the torment which had forced him to leave his own house had lost its sharpness when it lost its uncertainty, now that Odette's other life, of which he had had, at that first moment, a sudden helpless suspicion, was definitely there, almost within his grasp, before his eyes, in the full glare of the lamp-light, caught and kept there, an unwitting prisoner, in that room into which, when he would, he might force his way to surprise and seize it; or rather he would tap upon the shutters, as he had often done when he had come there very late, and by that signal Odette would at least learn that he knew, that he had seen the light and had heard the voices; while he himself, who a moment ago had been picturing her as laughing at him, as sharing with that other the knowledge of how effectively he had been tricked, now it was he that saw them, confident and persistent in their error, tricked and trapped by none other than himself, whom they believed to be a mile away, but who was there, in person, there with a plan, there with the knowledge that he was going, in another minute, to tap upon the shutter. And, perhaps, what he felt (almost an agreeable feeling) at that moment was something more than relief at the solution of a doubt, at the soothing of a pain; was an intellectual pleasure. If, since he had fallen in love, things had recovered a little of the delicate attraction that they had had for him long ago—though only when a light was shed upon them by a thought, a memory of Odette—now it was another of the faculties, prominent in the studious days of his youth, that Odette had quickened with new life, the passion for truth, but for a truth which, too, was interposed between himself and his mistress, receiving its light from her alone, a private and personal truth the sole object of which (an infinitely precious object, and one almost impersonal in its absolute beauty) was Odette—Odette in her activities, her environment, her projects, and her past. At every other period in his life, the little everyday words and actions of another person had always seemed wholly valueless to Swann; if gossip about such things were repeated to him, he would dismiss it as insignificant, and while he listened it was only the lowest, the most commonplace part of his mind that was interested; at such moments he felt utterly dull and uninspired. But in this strange phase of love the personality of another person becomes so enlarged, so deepened, that the curiosity which he could now feel aroused in himself, to know the least details of a woman's daily occupation, was the same thirst for knowledge with which he had once studied history. And all manner of actions, from which, until now, he would have recoiled in shame, such as spying, to-night, outside a window, to-morrow, for all he knew, putting adroitly provocative questions to casual witnesses, bribing servants, listening at doors, seemed to him, now, to be precisely on a level with the deciphering of manuscripts, the weighing of evidence, the interpretation of old monuments, that was to say, so many different methods of scientific investigation, each one having a definite intellectual value and being legitimately employable in the search for truth.

As his hand stole out towards the shutters he felt a pang of shame at the thought that Odette would now know that he had suspected her, that he had returned, that he had posted himself outside her window. She had often told him what a horror she had of jealous men, of lovers who spied. What he was going to do would be extremely awkward, and she would detest him for ever after, whereas now, for the moment, for so long as he refrained from knocking, perhaps even in the act of infidelity, she loved him still. How often is not the prospect of future happiness thus sacrificed to one's impatient insistence upon an immediate gratification. But his desire to know the truth was stronger, and seemed to him nobler than his desire for her. He knew that the true story of certain events, which he would have given his life to be able to reconstruct accurately and in full, was to be read within that window, streaked with bars of light, as within the illuminated, golden boards of one of those precious manuscripts, by whose wealth of artistic treasures the scholar who consults them cannot remain unmoved. He yearned for the satisfaction of knowing the truth which so impassioned him in that brief, fleeting, precious transcript, on that translucent page, so warm, so beautiful. And besides, the advantage which he felt—which he so desperately wanted to feel—that he had over them, lay perhaps not so much in knowing as in being able to shew them that he knew. He drew himself up on tiptoe. He knocked. They had not heard; he knocked again; louder; their conversation ceased. A man's voice—he strained his ears to distinguish whose, among such of Odette's friends as he knew, the voice could be—asked:

"Who's that?"

He could not be certain of the voice. He knocked once again. The window first, then the shutters were thrown open. It was too late, now, to retire, and since she must know all, so as not to seem too contemptible, too jealous and inquisitive, he called out in a careless, hearty, welcoming tone:

"Please don't bother; I just happened to be passing, and saw the light. I wanted to know if you were feeling better."

He looked up. Two old gentlemen stood facing him, in the window, one of them with a lamp in his hand; and beyond them he could see into the room, a room that he had never seen before. Having fallen into the habit, when he came late to Odette, of identifying her window by the fact that it was the only one still lighted in a row of windows otherwise all alike, he had been misled, this time, by the light, and had knocked at the window beyond hers, in the adjoining house. He made what apology he could and hurried home, overjoyed that the satisfaction of his curiosity had preserved their love intact, and that, having feigned for so long, when in Odette's company, a sort of indifference, he had not now, by a demonstration of jealousy, given her that proof of the excess of his own passion which, in a pair of lovers, fully and finally dispenses the recipient from the obligation to love the other enough. He never spoke to her of this misadventure, he ceased even to think of it himself. But now and then his thoughts in their wandering course would come upon this memory where it lay unobserved, would startle it into life, thrust it more deeply down into his consciousness, and leave him aching with a sharp, far-rooted pain. As though this had been a bodily pain, Swann's mind was powerless to alleviate it; in the case of bodily pain, however, since it is independent of the mind, the mind can dwell upon it, can note that it has diminished, that it has momentarily ceased. But with this mental pain, the mind, merely by recalling it, created it afresh. To determine not to think of it was but to think of it still, to suffer from it still. And when, in conversation with his friends, he forgot his sufferings, suddenly a word casually uttered would make him change countenance as a wounded man does when a clumsy hand has touched his aching limb. When he came away from Odette, he was happy, he felt calm, he recalled the smile with which, in gentle mockery, she had spoken to him of this man or of that, a smile which was all tenderness for himself; he recalled the gravity of her head which she seemed to have lifted from its axis to let it droop and fall, as though against her will, upon his lips, as she had done on that first evening in the carriage; her languishing gaze at him while she lay nestling in his arms, her bended head seeming to recede between her shoulders, as though shrinking from the cold.

But then, at once, his jealousy, as it had been the shadow of his love, presented him with the complement, with the converse of that new smile with which she had greeted him that very evening,—with which, now, perversely, she was mocking Swann while she tendered her love to another —of that lowering of her head, but lowered now to fall on other lips, and (but bestowed upon a stranger) of all the marks of affection that she had shewn to him. And all these voluptuous memories which he bore away from her house were, as one might say, but so many sketches, rough plans, like the schemes of decoration which a designer submits to one in outline, enabling Swann to form an idea of the various attitudes, aflame or faint with passion, which she was capable of adopting for others. With the result that he came to regret every pleasure that he tasted in her company, every new caress that he invented (and had been so imprudent as to point out to her how delightful it was), every fresh charm that he found in her, for he knew that, a moment later, they would go to enrich the collection of instruments in his secret torture-chamber.

A fresh turn was given to the screw when Swann recalled a sudden expression which he had intercepted, a few days earlier, and for the first time, in Odette's eyes. It was after dinner at the Verdurins'. Whether it was because Forcheville, aware that Saniette, his brother-in-law, was not in favour with them, had decided to make a butt of him, and to shine at his expense, or because he had been annoyed by some awkward remark which Saniette had made to him, although it had passed unnoticed by the rest of the party who knew nothing of whatever tactless allusion it might conceal, or possibly because he had been for some time looking out for an opportunity of securing the expulsion from the house of a fellow-guest who knew rather too much about him, and whom he knew to be so nice-minded that he himself could not help feeling embarrassed at times merely by his presence in the room, Forcheville replied to Saniette's tactless utterance with such a volley of abuse, going out of his way to insult him, emboldened, the louder he shouted, by the fear, the pain, the entreaties of his victim, that the poor creature, after asking Mme. Verdurin whether he should stay and receiving no answer, had left the house in stammering confusion and with tears in his eyes. Odette had looked on, impassive, at this scene; but when the door had closed behind Saniette, she had forced the normal expression of her face down, as the saying is, by several pegs, so as to bring herself on to the same level of vulgarity as Forcheville; her eyes had sparkled with a malicious smile of congratulation upon his audacity, of ironical pity for the poor wretch who had been its victim; she had darted at him a look of complicity in the crime, which so clearly implied: "That's finished him off, or I'm very much mistaken. Did you see what a fool he looked? He was actually crying," that Forcheville, when his eyes met hers, sobered in a moment from the anger, or pretended anger with which he was still flushed, smiled as he explained: "He need only have made himself pleasant and he'd have been here still; a good scolding does a man no harm, at any time."

One day when Swann had gone out early in the afternoon to pay a call, and had failed to find the person at home whom he wished to see, it occurred to him to go, instead, to Odette, at an hour when, although he never went to her house then as a rule, he knew that she was always at home, resting or writing letters until tea-time, and would enjoy seeing her for a moment, if it did not disturb her. The porter told him that he believed Odette to be in; Swann rang the bell, thought that he heard a sound, that he heard footsteps, but no one came to the door. Anxious and annoyed, he went round to the other little street, at the back of her house, and stood beneath her bedroom window; the curtains were drawn and he could see nothing; he knocked loudly upon the pane, he shouted; still no one came. He could see that the neighbours were staring at him. He turned away, thinking that, after all, he had perhaps been mistaken in believing that he heard footsteps; but he remained so preoccupied with the suspicion that he could turn his mind to nothing else. After waiting for an hour, he returned. He found her at home; she told him that she had been in the house when he rang, but had been asleep; the bell had awakened her; she had guessed that it must be Swann, and had run out to meet him, but he had already gone. She had, of course, heard him knocking at the window. Swann could at once detect in this story one of those fragments of literal truth which liars, when taken by surprise, console themselves by introducing into the composition of the falsehood which they have to invent, thinking that it can be safely incorporated, and will lend the whole story an air of verisimilitude. It was true that, when Odette had just done something which she did not wish to disclose, she would take pains to conceal it in a secret place in her heart. But as soon as she found herself face to face with the man to whom she was obliged to lie, she became uneasy, all her ideas melted like wax before a flame, her inventive and her reasoning faculties were paralysed, she might ransack her brain but would find only a void; still, she must say something, and there lay within her reach precisely the fact which she had wished to conceal, which, being the truth, was the one thing that had remained. She broke off from it a tiny fragment, of no importance in itself, assuring herself that, after all, it was the best thing to do, since it was a detail of the truth, and less dangerous, therefore, than a falsehood. "At any rate, this is true," she said to herself; "that's always something to the good; he may make inquiries; he will see that this is true; it won't be this, anyhow, that will give me away." But she was wrong; it was what gave her away; she had not taken into account that this fragmentary detail of the truth had sharp edges which could not be made to fit in, except to those contiguous fragments of the truth from which she had arbitrarily detached it, edges which, whatever the fictitious details in which she might embed it, would continue to shew, by their overlapping angles and by the gaps which she had forgotten to fill, that its proper place was elsewhere.

"She admits that she heard me ring, and then knock, that she knew it was myself, that she wanted to see me," Swann thought to himself. "But that doesn't correspond with the fact that she did not let me in."

He did not, however, draw her attention to this inconsistency, for he thought that, if left to herself, Odette might perhaps produce some falsehood which would give him a faint indication of the truth; she spoke; he did not interrupt her, he gathered up, with an eager and sorrowful piety, the words that fell from her lips, feeling (and rightly feeling, since she was hiding the truth behind them as she spoke) that, like the veil of a sanctuary, they kept a vague imprint, traced a faint outline of that infinitely precious and, alas, undiscoverable truth;—what she had been doing, that afternoon, at three o'clock, when he had called,—a truth of which he would never possess any more than these falsifications, illegible and divine traces, a truth which would exist henceforward only in the secretive memory of this creature, who would contemplate it in utter ignorance of its value, but would never yield it up to him. It was true that he had, now and then, a strong suspicion that Odette's daily activities were not in themselves passionately interesting, and that such relations as she might have with other men did not exhale, naturally, in a universal sense, or for every rational being, a spirit of morbid gloom capable of infecting with fever or of inciting to suicide. He realised, at such moments, that that interest, that gloom, existed in him only as a malady might exist, and that, once he was cured of the malady, the actions of Odette, the kisses that she might have bestowed, would become once again as innocuous as those of countless other women. But the consciousness that the painful curiosity with which Swann now studied them had its origin only in himself was not enough to make him decide that it was unreasonable to regard that curiosity as important, and to take every possible step to satisfy it. Swann had, in fact, reached an age the philosophy of which—supported, in his case, by the current philosophy of the day, as well as by that of the circle in which he had spent most of his life, the group that surrounded the Princesse des Laumes, in which one's intelligence was understood to increase with the strength of one's disbelief in everything, and nothing real and incontestable was to be discovered, except the individual tastes of each of its members—is no longer that of youth, but a positive, almost a medical philosophy, the philosophy of men who, instead of fixing their aspirations upon external objects, endeavour to separate from the accumulation of the years already spent a definite residue of habits and passions which they can regard as characteristic and permanent, and with which they will deliberately arrange, before anything else, that the kind of existence which they choose to adopt shall not prove inharmonious. Swann deemed it wise to make allowance in his life for the suffering which he derived from not knowing what Odette had done, just as he made allowance for the impetus which a damp climate always gave to his eczema; to anticipate in his budget the expenditure of a considerable sum on procuring, with regard to the daily occupations of Odette, information the lack of which would make him unhappy, just as he reserved a margin for the gratification of other tastes from which he knew that pleasure was to be expected (at least, before he had fallen in love) such as his taste for collecting things, or for good cooking.

When he proposed to take leave of Odette, and to return home, she begged him to stay a little longer, and even detained him forcibly, seizing him by the arm as he was opening the door to go. But he gave no thought to that, for, among the crowd of gestures and speeches and other little incidents which go to make up a conversation, it is inevitable that we should pass (without noticing anything that arouses our interest) by those that hide a truth for which our suspicions are blindly searching, whereas we stop to examine others beneath which nothing lies concealed. She kept on saying: "What a dreadful pity; you never by any chance come in the afternoon, and the one time you do come then I miss you." He knew very well that she was not sufficiently in love with him to be so keenly distressed merely at having missed his visit, but as she was a good-natured woman, anxious to give him pleasure, and often sorry when she had done anything that annoyed him, he found it quite natural that she should be sorry, on this occasion, that she had deprived him of that pleasure of spending an hour in her company, which was so very great a pleasure, if not to herself, at any rate to him. All the same, it was a matter of so little importance that her air of unrelieved sorrow began at length to bewilder him. She reminded him, even more than was usual, of the faces of some of the women created by the painter of the 'Primavera.' She had, at that moment, their downcast, heartbroken expression, which seems ready to succumb beneath the burden of a grief too heavy to be borne, when they are merely allowing the Infant Jesus to play with a pomegranate, or watching Moses pour water into a trough. He had seen the same sorrow once before on her face, but when, he could no longer say. Then, suddenly, he remembered it; it was when Odette had lied, in apologising to Mme. Verdurin on the evening after the dinner from which she had stayed away on a pretext of illness, but really so that she might be alone with Swann. Surely, even had she been the most scrupulous of women, she could hardly have felt remorse for so innocent a lie. But the lies which Odette ordinarily told were less innocent, and served to prevent discoveries which might have involved her in the most terrible difficulties with one or another of her friends. And so, when she lied, smitten with fear, feeling herself to be but feebly armed for her defence, unconfident of success, she was inclined to weep from sheer exhaustion, as children weep sometimes when they have not slept. She knew, also, that her lie, as a rule, was doing a serious injury to the man to whom she was telling it, and that she might find herself at his mercy if she told it badly. Therefore she felt at once humble and culpable in his presence. And when she had to tell an insignificant, social lie its hazardous associations, and the memories which it recalled, would leave her weak with a sense of exhaustion and penitent with a consciousness of wrongdoing.

What depressing lie was she now concocting for Swann's benefit, to give her that pained expression, that plaintive voice, which seemed to falter beneath the effort that she was forcing herself to make, and to plead for pardon? He had an idea that it was not merely the truth about what had occurred that afternoon that she was endeavouring to hide from him, but something more immediate, something, possibly, which had not yet happened, but might happen now at any time, and, when it did, would throw a light upon that earlier event. At that moment, he heard the front-door bell ring. Odette never stopped speaking, but her words dwindled into an inarticulate moan. Her regret at not having seen Swann that afternoon, at not having opened the door to him, had melted into a universal despair.

He could hear the gate being closed, and the sound of a carriage, as though some one were going away—probably the person whom Swann must on no account meet—after being told that Odette was not at home. And then, when he reflected that, merely by coming at an hour when he was not in the habit of coming, he had managed to disturb so many arrangements of which she did not wish him to know, he had a feeling of discouragement that amounted, almost, to distress. But since he was in love with Odette, since he was in the habit of turning all his thoughts towards her, the pity with which he might have been inspired for himself he felt for her only, and murmured: "Poor darling!" When finally he left her, she took up several letters which were lying on the table, and asked him if he would be so good as to post them for her. He walked along to the post-office, took the letters from his pocket, and, before dropping each of them into the box, scanned its address. They were all to tradesmen, except the last, which was to Forcheville. He kept it in his hand. "If I saw what was in this," he argued, "I should know what she calls him, what she says to him, whether there really is anything between them. Perhaps, if I don't look inside, I shall be lacking in delicacy towards Odette, since in this way alone I can rid myself of a suspicion which is, perhaps, a calumny on her, which must, in any case, cause her suffering, and which can never possibly be set at rest, once the letter is posted."

He left the post-office and went home, but he had kept the last letter in his pocket. He lighted a candle, and held up close to its flame the envelope which he had not dared to open. At first he could distinguish nothing, but the envelope was thin, and by pressing it down on to the stiff card which it enclosed he was able, through the transparent paper, to read the concluding words. They were a coldly formal signature. If, instead of its being himself who was looking at a letter addressed to Forcheville, it had been Forcheville who had read a letter addressed to Swann, he might have found words in it of another, a far more tender kind! He took a firm hold of the card, which was sliding to and fro, the envelope being too large for it, and then, by moving it with his finger and thumb, brought one line after another beneath the part of the envelope where the paper was not doubled, through which alone it was possible to read.

In spite of all these manœuvres he could not make it out clearly. Not that it mattered, for he had seen enough to assure himself that the letter was about some trifling incident of no importance, and had nothing at all to do with love; it was something to do with Odette's uncle. Swann had read quite plainly at the beginning of the line "I was right," but did not understand what Odette had been right in doing, until suddenly a word which he had not been able, at first, to decipher, came to light and made the whole sentence intelligible: "I was right to open the door; it was my uncle." To open the door! Then Forcheville had been there when Swann rang the bell, and she had sent him away; hence the sound that Swann had heard.

After that he read the whole letter; at the end she apologised for having treated Forcheville with so little ceremony, and reminded him that he had left his cigarette-case at her house, precisely what she had written to Swann after one of his first visits. But to Swann she had added: "Why did you not forget your heart also? I should never have let you have that back." To Forcheville nothing of that sort; no allusion that could suggest any intrigue between them. And, really, he was obliged to admit that in all this business Forcheville had been worse treated than himself, since Odette was writing to him to make him believe that her visitor had been an uncle. From which it followed that he, Swann, was the man to whom she attached importance, and for whose sake she had sent the other away. And yet, if there had been nothing between Odette and Forcheville, why not have opened the door at once, why have said, "I was right to open the door; it was my uncle." Right? if she was doing nothing wrong at that moment how could Forcheville possibly have accounted for her not opening the door? For a time Swann stood still there, heartbroken, bewildered, and yet happy; gazing at this envelope which Odette had handed to him without a scruple, so absolute was her trust in his honour; through its transparent window there had been disclosed to him, with the secret history of an incident which he had despaired of ever being able to learn, a fragment of the life of Odette, seen as through a narrow, luminous incision, cut into its surface without her knowledge. Then his jealousy rejoiced at the discovery, as though that jealousy had had an independent existence, fiercely egotistical, gluttonous of every thing that would feed its vitality, even at the expense of Swann himself. Now it had food in store, and Swann could begin to grow uneasy afresh every evening, over the visits that Odette had received about five o'clock, and could seek to discover where Forcheville had been at that hour. For Swann's affection for Odette still preserved the form which had been imposed on it, from the beginning, by his ignorance of the occupations in which she passed her days, as well as by the mental lethargy which prevented him from supplementing that ignorance by imagination. He was not jealous, at first, of the whole of Odette's life, but of those moments only in which an incident, which he had perhaps misinterpreted, had led him to suppose that Odette might have played him false. His jealousy, like an octopus which throws out a first, then a second, and finally a third tentacle, fastened itself irremovably first to that moment, five o'clock in the afternoon, then to another, then to another again. But Swann was incapable of inventing his sufferings. They were only the memory, the perpetuation of a suffering that had come to him from without.

From without, however, everything brought him fresh suffering. He decided to separate Odette from Forcheville, by taking her away for a few days to the south. But he imagined that she was coveted by every male person in the hotel, and that she coveted them in return. And so he, who, in old days, when he travelled, used always to seek out new people and crowded places, might now be seen fleeing savagely from human society as if it had cruelly injured him. And how could he not have turned misanthrope, when in every man he saw a potential lover for Odette? Thus his jealousy did even more than the happy, passionate desire which he had originally felt for Odette had done to alter Swann's character, completely changing, in the eyes of the world, even the outward signs by which that character had been intelligible.

A month after the evening on which he had intercepted and read Odette's letter to Forcheville, Swann went to a dinner which the Verdurins were giving in the Bois. As the party was breaking up he noticed a series of whispered discussions between Mme. Verdurin and several of her guests, and thought that he heard the pianist being reminded to come next day to a party at Chatou; now he, Swann, had not been invited to any party.

The Verdurins had spoken only in whispers, and in vague terms, but the painter, perhaps without thinking, shouted out: "There must be no lights of any sort, and he must play the Moonlight Sonata in the dark, for us to see by."

Mme. Verdurin, seeing that Swann was within earshot, assumed that expression in which the two-fold desire to make the speaker be quiet and to preserve, oneself, an appearance of guilelessness in the eyes of the listener, is neutralised in an intense vacuity; in which the unflinching signs of intelligent complicity are overlaid by the smiles of innocence, an expression invariably adopted by anyone who has noticed a blunder, the enormity of which is thereby at once revealed if not to those who have made it, at any rate to him in whose hearing it ought not to have been made. Odette seemed suddenly to be in despair, as though she had decided not to struggle any longer against the crushing difficulties of life, and Swann was anxiously counting the minutes that still separated him from the point at which, after leaving the restaurant, while he drove her home, he would be able to ask for an explanation, to make her promise, either that she would not go to Chatou next day, or that she would procure an invitation for him also, and to lull to rest in her arms the anguish that still tormented him. At last the carriages were ordered. Mme. Verdurin said to Swann:

"Good-bye, then. We shall see you soon, I hope," trying, by the friendliness of her manner and the constraint of her smile, to prevent him from noticing that she was not saying, as she would always have until then:

"To-morrow, then, at Chatou, and at my house the day after."

M. and Mme. Verdurin made Forcheville get into their carriage; Swann's was drawn up behind it, and he waited for theirs to start before helping Odette into his own.

"Odette, we'll take you," said Mme. Verdurin, "we've kept a little corner specially for you, beside M. de Forcheville."

"Yes, Mme. Verdurin," said Odette meekly.

"What! I thought I was to take you home," cried Swann, flinging discretion to the winds, for the carriage-door hung open, time was precious, and he could not, in his present state, go home without her.

"But Mme. Verdurin has asked me . . ."

"That's all right, you can quite well go home alone; we've left you like this dozens of times," said Mme. Verdurin.

"But I had something important to tell Mme. de Crécy."

"Very well, you can write it to her instead."

"Good-bye," said Odette, holding out her hand.

He tried hard to smile, but could only succeed in looking utterly dejected.

"What do you think of the airs that Swann is pleased to put on with us?" Mme. Verdurin asked her husband when they had reached home. "I was afraid he was going to eat me, simply because we offered to take Odette back. It really is too bad, that sort of thing. Why doesn't he say, straight out, that we keep a disorderly house? I can't conceive how Odette can stand such manners. He positively seems to be saying, all the time, 'You belong to me!' I shall tell Odette exactly what I think about it all, and I hope she will have the sense to understand me." A moment later she added, inarticulate with rage: "No, but, don't you see, the filthy creature . . ." using unconsciously, and perhaps in satisfaction of the same obscure need to justify herself—like Françoise at Combray when the chicken refused to die—the very words which the last convulsions of an inoffensive animal in its death agony wring from the peasant who is engaged in taking its life. And when Mme. Verdurin's carriage had moved on, and Swann's took its place, his coachman, catching sight of his face, asked whether he was unwell, or had heard bad news.

Swann sent him away; he preferred to walk, and it was on foot, through the Bois, that he came home. He talked to himself, aloud, and in the same slightly affected tone which he had been used to adopt when describing the charms of the 'little nucleus' and extolling the magnanimity of the Verdurins. But just as the conversation, the smiles, the kisses of Odette became as odious to him as he had once found them charming, if they were diverted to others than himself, so the Verdurins' drawing-room, which, not an hour before, had still seemed to him amusing, inspired with a genuine feeling for art and even with a sort of moral aristocracy, now that it was another than himself whom Odette was going to meet there, to love there without restraint, laid bare to him all its absurdities, its stupidity, its shame.

He drew a fanciful picture, at which he shuddered in disgust, of the party next evening at Chatou. "Imagine going to Chatou, of all places! Like a lot of drapers after closing time! Upon my word, these people are sublime in their smugness; they can't really exist; they must all have come out of one of Labiche's plays!"

The Cottards would be there; possibly Brichot. "Could anything be more grotesque than the lives of these little creatures, hanging on to one another like that. They'd imagine they were utterly lost, upon my soul they would, if they didn't all meet again to-morrow at *Chatou*!" Alas! there would be the painter there also, the painter who enjoyed match-making, who would invite Forcheville to come with Odette to his studio. He could see Odette, in a dress far too smart for the country, "for she is so vulgar in that way, and, poor little thing, she is such a fool!"

He could hear the jokes that Mme. Verdurin would make after dinner, jokes which, whoever the 'bore' might be at whom they were aimed, had always amused him because he could watch Odette laughing at them, laughing with him, her laughter almost a part of his. Now he felt that it was possibly at him that they would make Odette laugh. "What a fetid form of humour!" he exclaimed, twisting his mouth into an expression of disgust so violent that he could feel the muscles of his throat stiffen against his collar. "How, in God's name, can a creature made in His image find anything to laugh at in those nauseating witticisms? The least sensitive nose must be driven away in horror from such stale exhalations. It is really impossible to believe that any human being is incapable of understanding that, in allowing herself merely to smile at the expense of a fellow-creature who has loyally held out his hand to her, she is casting herself into a mire from which it will be impossible, with the best will in the world, ever to rescue her. I dwell so many miles above the puddles in which these filthy little vermin sprawl and crawl and bawl their cheap obscenities, that I cannot possibly be spattered by the witticisms of a Verdurin!" he cried, tossing up his head and arrogantly straightening his body. "God knows that I have honestly attempted to pull Odette out of that sewer, and to teach her to breathe a nobler and a purer air. But human patience has its limits, and mine is at an end," he concluded, as though this sacred mission to tear Odette away from an atmosphere of sarcasms dated from longer than a few minutes ago, as though he had not undertaken it only since it had occurred to him that those sarcasms might, perchance, be directed at himself, and might have the effect of detaching Odette from him.

He could see the pianist sitting down to play the Moonlight Sonata, and the grimaces of Mme. Verdurin, in terrified anticipation of the wrecking of her nerves by Beethoven's music. "Idiot, liar!" he shouted, "and a creature like that imagines that she's fond of *Art*!" She would say to Odette, after deftly insinuating a few words of praise for Forcheville, as she had so often done for himself: "You can make room for M. de Forcheville there, can't you, Odette?" . . . " 'In the dark!' Codfish! Pander!" . . . 'Pander' was the name he applied also to the music which would invite them to sit in silence, to dream together, to gaze in each other's eyes, to feel for each other's hands. He felt that there was much to be said, after all, for a sternly censorous attitude towards the arts, such as Plato adopted, and Bossuet, and the old school of education in France.

In a word, the life which they led at the Verdurins', which he had so often described as 'genuine,' seemed to him now the worst possible form of life, and their 'little nucleus' the most degraded class of society. "It really is," he repeated, "beneath the lowest rung of the social ladder, the nethermost circle of Dante. Beyond a doubt, the august words of the Florentine refer to the Verdurins! When one comes to think of it, surely people 'in society' (and, though one may find fault with them now and then, still, after all they are a very different matter from that gang of blackmailers) shew a profound sagacity in refusing to know them, or even to dirty the tips of their fingers with them. What a sound intuition there is in that '*Noli me tangere*' motto of the Faubourg Saint-Germain."

He had long since emerged from the paths and avenues of the Bois, he had almost reached his own house, and still, for he had not yet thrown off the intoxication of grief, or his whim of insincerity, but was ever more and more exhilarated by the false intonation, the artificial sonority of his own voice, he continued to perorate aloud in the silence of the night: "People 'in society' have their failings, as no one knows better than I; but, after all, they are people to whom some things, at least, are impossible. So-and-so" (a fashionable woman whom he had known) "was far from being perfect, but, after all, one did find in her a fundamental delicacy, a loyalty in her conduct which made her, whatever happened, incapable of a felony, which fixes a vast gulf between her and an old hag like Verdurin. Verdurin! What a name! Oh, there's something complete about them, something almost fine in their trueness to type; they're the most perfect specimens of their disgusting class! Thank God, it was high time that I stopped condescending to promiscuous intercourse with such infamy, such dung."

But, just as the virtues which he had still attributed, an hour or so earlier, to the Verdurins, would not have sufficed, even although the Verdurins had actually possessed them, if they had not also favoured and protected his love, to excite Swann to that state of intoxication in which he waxed tender over their magnanimity, an intoxication which, even when disseminated through the medium of other persons, could have come to him from Odette alone;—so the immorality (had it really existed) which he now found in the Verdurins would have been powerless, if they had not invited Odette with Forcheville and without him, to unstop the vials of his wrath and to make him scarify their 'infamy.' Doubtless Swann's voice shewed a finer perspicacity than his own when it refused to utter those words full of disgust at the Verdurins and their circle, and of joy at his having shaken himself free of it, save in an artificial and rhetorical tone, and as though his words had been chosen rather to appease his anger than to express his thoughts. The latter, in fact, while he abandoned himself to invective, were probably, though he did not know it, occupied with a wholly different matter, for once he had reached his house, no sooner had he closed the front-door behind him than he suddenly struck his forehead, and, making his servant open the door again, dashed out into the street shouting, in a voice which, this time, was quite natural; "I believe I have found a way of getting invited to the dinner at Chatou to-morrow!" But it must have been a bad way, for M. Swann was not invited; Dr. Cottard, who, having been summoned to attend a serious case in the country, had not seen the Verdurins for some days, and had been prevented from appearing at Chatou, said, on the evening after this dinner, as he sat down to table at their house:

"Why, aren't we going to see M. Swann this evening? He is quite what you might call a personal friend . . ." "I sincerely trust that we sha'n't!" cried Mme. Verdurin. "Heaven preserve us from him; he's too deadly for words, a stupid, ill-bred boor."

On hearing these words Cottard exhibited an intense astonishment blended with entire submission, as though in the face of a scientific truth which contradicted everything that he had previously believed, but was supported by an irresistible weight of evidence; with timorous emotion he bowed his head over his plate, and merely replied: "Oh—oh—oh—oh—oh!" traversing, in an orderly retirement of his forces, into the depths of his being, along a descending scale, the whole compass of his voice. After which there was no more talk of Swann at the Verdurins'.

And so that drawing-room which had brought Swann and Odette together became an obstacle in the way of their meeting. She no longer said to him, as she had said in the early days of their love: "We shall meet, anyhow, to-morrow evening; there's a supper-party at the Verdurins'," but "We sha'n't be able to meet to-morrow evening; there's a supper-party at the Verdurins'." Or else the Verdurins were taking her to the Opéra-Comique, to see *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre,* and Swann could read in her eyes that terror lest he should ask her not to go, which, but a little time before, he could not have refrained from greeting with a kiss as it flitted across the face of his mistress, but which now exasperated him. "Yet I'm not really angry," he assured himself, "when I see how she longs to run away and scratch from maggots in that dunghill of cacophony. I'm disappointed; not for myself, but for her; disappointed to find that, after living for more than six months in daily contact with myself, she has not been capable of improving her mind even to the point of spontaneously eradicating from it a taste for Victor Massé! More than that, to find that she has not arrived at the stage of understanding that there are evenings on which anyone with the least shade of refinement of feeling should be willing to forego an amusement when she is asked to do so. She ought to have the sense to say: 'I shall not go,' if it were only from policy, since it is by what she answers now that the quality of her soul will be determined once and for all." And having persuaded himself that it was solely, after all, in order that he might arrive at a favourable estimate of Odette's spiritual worth that he wished her to stay at home with him that evening instead of going to the Opéra-Comique, he adopted the same line of reasoning with her, with the same degree of insincerity as he had used with himself, or even with a degree more, for in her case he was yielding also to the desire to capture her by her own self-esteem.

"I swear to you," he told her, shortly before she was to leave for the theatre, "that, in asking you not to go, I should hope, were I a selfish man, for nothing so much as that you should refuse, for I have a thousand other things to do this evening, and I shall feel that I have been tricked and trapped myself, and shall be thoroughly annoyed, if, after all, you tell me that you are not going. But my occupations, my pleasures are not everything; I must think of you also. A day may come when, seeing me irrevocably sundered from you, you will be entitled to reproach me with not having warned you at the decisive hour in which I felt that I was going to pass judgment on you, one of those stern judgments which love cannot long resist. You see, your *Nuit de Cléopâtre* (what a title!) has no bearing on the point. What I must know is whether you are indeed one of those creatures in the lowest grade of mentality and even of charm, one of those contemptible creatures who are incapable of foregoing a pleasure. For if you are such, how could anyone love you, for you are not even a person, a definite, imperfect, but at least perceptible entity. You are a formless water that will trickle down any slope that it may come upon, a fish devoid of memory, incapable of thought, which all its life long in its aquarium will continue to dash itself, a hundred times a day, against a wall of glass, always mistaking it for water. Do you realise that your answer will have the effect—I do not say of making me cease from that moment to love you, that goes without saying, but of making you less attractive to my eyes when I realise that you are not a person, that you are beneath everything in the world and have not the intelligence to raise yourself one inch higher? Obviously, I should have preferred to ask you, as though it had been a matter of little or no importance, to give up your *Nuit de Cléopâtre* (since you compel me to sully my lips with so abject a name), in the hope that you would go to it none the less. But, since I had resolved to weigh you in the balance, to make so grave an issue depend upon your answer, I considered it more honourable to give you due warning."

Meanwhile, Odette had shewn signs of increasing emotion and uncertainty. Although the meaning of his tirade was beyond her, she grasped that it was to be included among the scenes of reproach or supplication, scenes which her familiarity with the ways of men enabled her, without paying any heed to the words that were uttered, to conclude that men would not make unless they were in love; that, from the moment when they were in love, it was superfluous to obey them, since they would only be more in love later on. And so, she would have heard Swann out with the utmost tranquillity had she not noticed that it was growing late, and that if he went on speaking for any length of time she would "never" as she told him with a fond smile, obstinate but slightly abashed, "get there in time for the Overture."

On other occasions he had assured himself that the one thing which, more than anything else, would make him cease to love her, would be her refusal to abandon the habit of lying. "Even from the point of view of coquetry, pure and simple," he had told her, "can't you see how much of your attraction you throw away when you stoop to lying? By a frank admission—how many faults you might redeem! Really, you are far less intelligent than I supposed!" In vain, however, did Swann expound to her thus all the reasons that she had for not lying; they might have succeeded in overthrowing any universal system of mendacity, but Odette had no such system; she contented herself, merely, whenever she wished Swann to remain in ignorance of anything that she had done, with not telling him of it. So that a lie was, to her, something to be used only as a special expedient; and the one thing that could make her decide whether she should avail herself of a lie or not was a reason which, too, was of a special and contingent order, namely the risk of Swann's discovering that she had not told him the truth.

Physically, she was passing through an unfortunate phase; she was growing stouter, and the expressive, sorrowful charm, the surprised, wistful expressions which she had formerly had, seemed to have vanished with her first youth, with the result that she became most precious to Swann at the very moment when he found her distinctly less good-looking. He would gaze at her for hours on end, trying to recapture the charm which he had once seen in her and could not find again. And yet the knowledge that, within this new and strange chrysalis, it was still Odette that lurked, still the same volatile temperament, artful and evasive, was enough to keep Swann seeking, with as much passion as ever, to captivate her. Then he would look at photographs of her, taken two years before, and would remember how exquisite she had been. And that would console him, a little, for all the sufferings that he voluntarily endured on her account.

When the Verdurins took her off to Saint-Germain, or to Chatou, or to Meulan, as often as not, if the weather was fine, they would propose to remain there for the night, and not go home until next day. Mme. Verdurin would endeavour to set at rest the scruples of the pianist, whose aunt had remained in Paris: "She will be only too glad to be rid of you for a day. How on earth could she be anxious, when she knows you're with us? Anyhow, I'll take you all under my wing; she can put the blame on me."

If this attempt failed, M. Verdurin would set off across country until he came to a telegraph office or some other kind of messenger, after first finding out which of the 'faithful' had anyone whom they must warn. But Odette would thank him, and assure him that she had no message for anyone, for she had told Swann, once and for all, that she could not possibly send messages to him, before all those people, without compromising herself. Sometimes she would be absent for several days on end, when the Verdurins took her to see the tombs at Dreux, or to Compiègne, on the painter's advice, to watch the sun setting through the forest—after which they went on to the Château of Pierrefonds.

"To think that she could visit really historic buildings with me, who have spent ten years in the study of architecture, who am constantly bombarded, by people who really count, to take them over Beauvais or Saint-Loup-de-Naud, and refuse to take anyone but her; and instead of that she trundles off with the lowest, the most brutally degraded of creatures, to go into ecstasies over the petrified excretions of Louis-Philippe and Viollet-le-Duc! One hardly needs much knowledge of art, I should say, to do that; though, surely, even without any particularly refined sense of smell, one would not deliberately choose to spend a holiday in the latrines, so as to be within range of their fragrant exhalations."

But when she had set off for Dreux or Pierrefonds—alas, without allowing him to appear there, as though by accident, at her side, for, as she said, that would "create a dreadful impression,"—he would plunge into the most intoxicating romance in the lover's library, the railway time-table, from which he learned the ways of joining her there in the afternoon, in the evening, even in the morning. The ways? More than that, the authority, the right to join her. For, after all, the time-table, and the trains themselves, were not meant for dogs. If the public were carefully informed, by means of printed advertisements, that at eight o'clock in the morning a train started for Pierrefonds which arrived there at ten, that could only be because going to Pierrefonds was a lawful act, for which permission from Odette would be superfluous; an act, moreover, which might be performed from a motive altogether different from the desire to see Odette, since persons who had never even heard of her performed it daily, and in such numbers as justified the labour and expense of stoking the engines.

So it came to this; that she could not prevent him from going to Pierrefonds if he chose to do so. Now that was precisely what he found that he did choose to do, and would at that moment be doing were he, like the travelling public, not acquainted with Odette. For a long time past he had wanted to form a more definite impression of Viollet-le-Duc's work as a restorer. And the weather being what it was, he felt an overwhelming desire to spend the day roaming in the forest of Compiègne.

It was, indeed, a piece of bad luck that she had forbidden him access to the one spot that tempted him to-day. To-day! Why, if he went down there, in defiance of her prohibition, he would be able to see her that very day! But then, whereas, if she had met, at Pierrefonds, some one who did not matter, she would have hailed him with obvious pleasure: "What, you here?" and would have invited him to come and see her at the hotel where she was staying with the Verdurins, if, on the other hand, it was himself, Swann, that she encountered there, she would be annoyed, would complain that she was being followed, would love him less in consequence, might even turn away in anger when she caught sight of him. "So, then, I am not to be allowed to go away for a day anywhere!" she would reproach him on her return, whereas in fact it was he himself who was not allowed to go.

He had had the sudden idea, so as to contrive to visit Compiègne and Pierrefonds without letting it be supposed that his object was to meet Odette, of securing an invitation from one of his friends, the Marquis de Forestelle, who had a country house in that neighbourhood. This friend, to whom Swann suggested the plan without disclosing its ulterior purpose, was beside himself with joy; he did not conceal his astonishment at Swann's consenting at last, after fifteen years, to come down and visit his property, and since he did not (he told him) wish to stay there, promised to spend some days, at least, in taking him for walks and excursions in the district. Swann imagined himself down there already with M. de Forestelle. Even before he saw Odette, even if he did not succeed in seeing her there, what a joy it would be to set foot on that soil where, not knowing the exact spot in which, at any moment, she was to be found, he would feel all around him the thrilling possibility of her suddenly appearing: in the courtyard of the Château, now beautiful in his eyes since it was on her account that he had gone to visit it; in all the streets of the town, which struck him as romantic; down every ride of the forest, roseate with the deep and tender glow of sunset;—innumerable and alternative hiding-places, to which would fly simultaneously for refuge, in the uncertain ubiquity of his hopes, his happy, vagabond and divided heart. "We mustn't, on any account," he would warn M. de Forestelle, "run across Odette and the Verdurins. I have just heard that they are at Pierrefonds, of all places, to-day. One has plenty of time to see them in Paris; it would hardly be worth while coming down here if one couldn't go a yard without meeting them." And his host would fail to understand why, once they had reached the place, Swann would change his plans twenty times in an hour, inspect the dining-rooms of all the hotels in Compiègne without being able to make up his mind to settle down in any of them, although he had found no trace anywhere of the Verdurins, seeming to be in search of what he had claimed to be most anxious to avoid, and would in fact avoid, the moment he found it, for if he had come upon the little 'group,' he would have hastened away at once with studied indifference, satisfied that he had seen Odette and she him, especially that she had seen him when he was not, apparently, thinking about her. But no; she would guess at once that it was for her sake that he had come there. And when M. de Forestelle came to fetch him, and it was time to start, he excused himself: "No, I'm afraid not; I can't go to Pierrefonds to-day. You see, Odette is there." And Swann was happy in spite of everything in feeling that if he, alone among mortals, had not the right to go to Pierrefonds that day, it was because he was in fact, for Odette, some one who differed from all other mortals, her lover; and because that restriction which for him alone was set upon the universal right to travel freely where one would, was but one of the many forms of that slavery, that love which was so dear to him. Decidedly, it was better not to risk a quarrel with her, to be patient, to wait for her return. He spent his days in poring over a map of the forest of Compiègne, as though it had been that of the 'Pays du Tendre'; he surrounded himself with photographs of the Château of Pierrefonds. When the day dawned on which it was possible that she might return, he opened the time-table again, calculated what train she must have taken, and, should she have postponed her departure, what trains were still left for her to take. He did not leave the house, for fear of missing a telegram, he did not go to bed, in case, having come by the last train, she decided to surprise him with a midnight visit. Yes! The front-door bell rang. There seemed some delay in opening the door, he wanted to awaken the porter, he leaned out of the window to shout to Odette, if it was Odette, for in spite of the orders which he had gone downstairs a dozen times to deliver in person, they were quite capable of telling her that he was not at home. It was only a servant coming in. He noticed the incessant rumble of passing carriages, to which he had never before paid any attention. He could hear them, one after another, a long way off, coming nearer, passing his door without stopping, and bearing away into the distance a message which was not for him. He waited all night, to no purpose, for the Verdurins had returned unexpectedly, and Odette had been in Paris since midday; it had not occurred to her to tell him; not knowing what to do with herself she had spent the evening alone at a theatre, had long since gone home to bed, and was peacefully asleep.

As a matter of fact, she had never given him a thought. And such moments as these, in which she forgot Swann's very existence, were of more value to Odette, did more to attach him to her, than all her infidelities. For in this way Swann was kept in that state of painful agitation which had once before been effective in making his interest blossom into love, on the night when he had failed to find Odette at the Verdurins' and had hunted for her all evening. And he did not have (as I had, afterwards, at Combray in my childhood) happy days in which to forget the sufferings that would return with the night. For his days, Swann must pass them without Odette; and as he told himself, now and then, to allow so pretty a woman to go out by herself in Paris was just as rash as to leave a case filled with jewels in the middle of the street. In this mood he would scowl furiously at the passers-by, as though they were so many pickpockets. But their faces—a collective and formless mass—escaped the grasp of his imagination, and so failed to feed the flame of his jealousy. The effort exhausted Swann's brain, until, passing his hand over his eyes, he cried out: "Heaven help me!" as people, after lashing themselves into an intellectual frenzy in their endeavours to master the problem of the reality of the external world, or that of the immortality of the soul, afford relief to their weary brains by an unreasoning act of faith. But the thought of his absent mistress was incessantly, indissolubly blended with all the simplest actions of Swann's daily life—when he took his meals, opened his letters, went for a walk or to bed—by the fact of his regret at having to perform those actions without her; like those initials of Philibert the Fair which, in the church of Brou, because of her grief, her longing for him, Margaret of Austria intertwined everywhere with her own. On some days, instead of staying at home, he would go for luncheon to a restaurant not far off, to which he had been attracted, some time before, by the excellence of its cookery, but to which he now went only for one of those reasons, at once mystical and absurd, which people call 'romantic'; because this restaurant (which, by the way, still exists) bore the same name as the street in which Odette lived: the Lapérouse. Sometimes, when she had been away on a short visit somewhere, several days would elapse before she thought of letting him know that she had returned to Paris. And then she would say quite simply, without taking (as she would once have taken) the precaution of covering herself, at all costs, with a little fragment borrowed from the truth, that she had just, at that very moment, arrived by the morning train. What she said was a falsehood; at least for Odette it was a falsehood, inconsistent, lacking (what it would have had, if true) the support of her memory of her actual arrival at the station; she was even prevented from forming a mental picture of what she was saying, while she said it, by the contradictory picture, in her mind, of whatever quite different thing she had indeed been doing at the moment when she pretended to have been alighting from the train. In Swann's mind, however, these words, meeting no opposition, settled and hardened until they assumed the indestructibility of a truth so indubitable that, if some friend happened to tell him that he had come by the same train and had not seen Odette, Swann would have been convinced that it was his friend who had made a mistake as to the day or hour, since his version did not agree with the words uttered by Odette. These words had never appeared to him false except when, before hearing them, he had suspected that they were going to be. For him to believe that she was lying, an anticipatory suspicion was indispensable. It was also, however, sufficient. Given that, everything that Odette might say appeared to him suspect. Did she mention a name: it was obviously that of one of her lovers; once this supposition had taken shape, he would spend weeks in tormenting himself; on one occasion he even approached a firm of 'inquiry agents' to find out the address and the occupation of the unknown rival who would give him no peace until he could be proved to have gone abroad, and who (he ultimately learned) was an uncle of Odette, and had been dead for twenty years.

Although she would not allow him, as a rule, to meet her at public gatherings, saying that people would talk, it happened occasionally that, at an evening party to which he and she had each been invited—at Forcheville's, at the painter's, or at a charity ball given in one of the Ministries—he found himself in the same room with her. He could see her, but dared not remain for fear of annoying her by seeming to be spying upon the pleasures which she tasted in other company, pleasures which—while he drove home in utter loneliness, and went to bed, as anxiously as I myself was to go to bed, some years later, on the evenings when he came to dine with us at Combray—seemed illimitable to him since he had not been able to see their end. And, once or twice, he derived from such evenings that kind of happiness which one would be inclined (did it not originate in so violent a reaction from an anxiety abruptly terminated) to call peaceful, since it consists in a pacifying of the mind: he had looked in for a moment at a revel in the painter's studio, and was getting ready to go home; he was leaving behind him Odette, transformed into a brilliant stranger, surrounded by men to whom her glances and her gaiety, which were not for him, seemed to hint at some voluptuous pleasure to be enjoyed there or elsewhere (possibly at the Bal des Incohérents, to which he trembled to think that she might be going on afterwards) which made Swann more jealous than the thought of their actual physical union, since it was more difficult to imagine; he was opening the door to go, when he heard himself called back in these words (which, by cutting off from the party that possible ending which had so appalled him, made the party itself seem innocent in retrospect, made Odette's return home a thing no longer inconceivable and terrible, but tender and familiar, a thing that kept close to his side, like a part of his own daily life, in his carriage; a thing that stripped Odette herself of the excess of brilliance and gaiety in her appearance, shewed that it was only a disguise which she had assumed for a moment, for his sake and not in view of any mysterious pleasures, a disguise of which she had already wearied)—in these words, which Odette flung out after him as he was crossing the threshold: "Can't you wait a minute for me? I'm just going; we'll drive back together and you can drop me." It was true that on one occasion Forcheville had asked to be driven home at the same time, but when, on reaching Odette's gate, he had begged to be allowed to come in too, she had replied, with a finger pointed at Swann: "Ah! That depends on this gentleman. You must ask him. Very well, you may come in, just for a minute, if you insist, but you mustn't stay long, for, I warn you, he likes to sit and talk quietly with me, and he's not at all pleased if I have visitors when he's here. Oh, if you only knew the creature as I know him; isn't that so, my love, there's no one that really knows you, is there, except me?"

And Swann was, perhaps, even more touched by the spectacle of her addressing him thus, in front of Forcheville, not only in these tender words of predilection, but also with certain criticisms, such as: "I feel sure you haven't written yet to your friends, about dining with them on Sunday. You needn't go if you don't want to, but you might at least be polite," or "Now, have you left your essay on Vermeer here, so that you can do a little more to it to-morrow? What a lazy-bones! I'm going to make you work, I can tell you," which proved that Odette kept herself in touch with his social engagements and his literary work, that they had indeed a life in common. And as she spoke she bestowed on him a smile which he interpreted as meaning that she was entirely his.

And then, while she was making them some orangeade, suddenly, just as when the reflector of a lamp that is badly fitted begins by casting all round an object, on the wall beyond it, huge and fantastic shadows which, in time, contract and are lost in the shadow of the object itself, all the terrible and disturbing ideas which he had formed of Odette melted away and vanished in the charming creature who stood there before his eyes. He had the sudden suspicion that this hour spent in Odette's house, in the lamp-light, was, perhaps, after all, not an artificial hour, invented for his special use (with the object of concealing that frightening and delicious thing which was incessantly in his thoughts without his ever being able to form a satisfactory impression of it, an hour of Odette's real life, of her life when he was not there, looking on) with theatrical properties and pasteboard fruits, but was perhaps a genuine hour of Odette's life; that, if he himself had not been there, she would have pulled forward the same armchair for Forcheville, would have poured out for him, not any unknown brew, but precisely that orangeade which she was now offering to them both; that the world inhabited by Odette was not that other world, fearful and supernatural, in which he spent his time in placing her—and which existed, perhaps, only in his imagination, but the real universe, exhaling no special atmosphere of gloom, comprising that table at which he might sit down, presently, and write, and this drink which he was being permitted, now, to taste; all the objects which he contemplated with as much curiosity and admiration as gratitude, for if, in absorbing his dreams, they had delivered him from an obsession, they themselves were, in turn, enriched by the absorption; they shewed him the palpable realisation of his fancies, and they interested his mind; they took shape and grew solid before his eyes, and at the same time they soothed his troubled heart. Ah! had fate but allowed him to share a single dwelling with Odette, so that in her house he should be in his own; if, when asking his servant what there would be for luncheon, it had been Odette's bill of fare that he had learned from the reply; if, when Odette wished to go for a walk, in the morning, along the Avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne, his duty as a good husband had obliged him, though he had no desire to go out, to accompany her, carrying her cloak when she was too warm; and in the evening, after dinner, if she wished to stay at home, and not to dress, if he had been forced to stay beside her, to do what she asked; then how completely would all the trivial details of Swann's life, which seemed to him now so gloomy, simply because they would, at the same time, have formed part of the life of Odette, have taken on—like that lamp, that orangeade, that armchair, which had absorbed so much of his dreams, which materialised so much of his longing,—a sort of superabundant sweetness and a mysterious solidity.

And yet he was inclined to suspect that the state for which he so much longed was a calm, a peace, which would not have created an atmosphere favourable to his love. When Odette ceased to be for him a creature always absent, regretted, imagined; when the feeling that he had for her was no longer the same mysterious disturbance that was wrought in him by the phrase from the sonata, but constant affection and gratitude, when those normal relations were established between them which would put an end to his melancholy madness; then, no doubt, the actions of Odette's daily life would appear to him as being of but little intrinsic interest—as he had several times, already, felt that they might be, on the day, for instance, when he had read, through its envelope, her letter to Forcheville. Examining his complaint with as much scientific detachment as if he had inoculated himself with it in order to study its effects, he told himself that, when he was cured of it, what Odette might or might not do would be indifferent to him. But in his morbid state, to tell the truth, he feared death itself no more than such a recovery, which would, in fact, amount to the death of all that he then was.

After these quiet evenings, Swann's suspicions would be temporarily lulled; he would bless the name of Odette, and next day, in the morning, would order the most attractive jewels to be sent to her, because her kindnesses to him overnight had excited either his gratitude, or the desire to see them repeated, or a paroxysm of love for her which had need of some such outlet.

But at other times, grief would again take hold of him; he would imagine that Odette was Forcheville's mistress, and that, when they had both sat watching him from the depths of the Verdurins' landau, in the Bois, on the evening before the party at Chatou to which he had not been invited, while he implored her in vain, with that look of despair on his face which even his coachman had noticed, to come home with him, and then turned away, solitary, crushed,—she must have employed, to draw Forcheville's attention to him, while she murmured: "Do look at him, storming!" the same glance, brilliant, malicious, sidelong, cunning, as on the evening when Forcheville had driven Saniette from the Verdurins'.

At such times Swann detested her. "But I've been a fool, too," he would argue. "I'm paying for other men's pleasures with my money. All the same, she'd better take care, and not pull the string too often, for I might very well stop giving her anything at all. At any rate, we'd better knock off supplementary favours for the time being. To think that, only yesterday, when she said she would like to go to Bayreuth for the season, I was such an ass as to offer to take one of those jolly little places the King of Bavaria has there, for the two of us. However she didn't seem particularly keen; she hasn't said yes or no yet. Let's hope that she'll refuse. Good God! Think of listening to Wagner for a fortnight on end with her, who takes about as much interest in music as a fish does in little apples; it will be fun!" And his hatred, like his love, needing to manifest itself in action, he amused himself with urging his evil imaginings further and further, because, thanks to the perfidies with which he charged Odette, he detested her still more, and would be able, if it turned out—as he tried to convince himself—that she was indeed guilty of them, to take the opportunity of punishing her, emptying upon her the overflowing vials of his wrath. In this way, he went so far as to suppose that he was going to receive a letter from her, in which she would ask him for money to take the house at Bayreuth, but with the warning that he was not to come there himself, as she had promised Forcheville and the Verdurins to invite them. Oh, how he would have loved it, had it been conceivable that she would have that audacity. What joy he would have in refusing, in drawing up that vindictive reply, the terms of which he amused himself by selecting and declaiming aloud, as though he had actually received her letter.

The very next day, her letter came. She wrote that the Verdurins and their friends had expressed a desire to be present at these performances of Wagner, and that, if he would be so good as to send her the money, she would be able at last, after going so often to their house, to have the pleasure of entertaining the Verdurins in hers. Of him she said not a word; it was to be taken for granted that their presence at Bayreuth would be a bar to his.

Then that annihilating answer, every word of which he had carefully rehearsed overnight, without venturing to hope that it could ever be used, he had the satisfaction of having it conveyed to her. Alas! he felt only too certain that with the money which she had, or could easily procure, she would be able, all the same, to take a house at Bayreuth, since she wished to do so, she who was incapable of distinguishing between Bach and Clapisson. Let her take it, then; she would have to live in it more frugally, that was all. No means (as there would have been if he had replied by sending her several thousand-franc notes) of organising, each evening, in her hired castle, those exquisite little suppers, after which she might perhaps be seized by the whim (which, it was possible, had never yet seized her) of falling into the arms of Forcheville. At any rate, this loathsome expedition, it would not be Swann who had to pay for it. Ah! if he could only manage to prevent it, if she could sprain her ankle before starting, if the driver of the carriage which was to take her to the station would consent (no matter how great the bribe) to smuggle her to some place where she could be kept for a time in seclusion, that perfidious woman, her eyes tinselled with a smile of complicity for Forcheville, which was what Odette had become for Swann in the last forty-eight hours.

But she was never that for very long; after a few days the shining, crafty eyes lost their brightness and their duplicity, that picture of an execrable Odette saying to Forcheville: "Look at him storming!" began to grow pale and to dissolve. Then gradually reappeared and rose before him, softly radiant, the face of the other Odette, of that Odette who also turned with a smile to Forcheville, but with a smile in which there was nothing but affection for Swann, when she said: "You mustn't stay long, for this gentleman doesn't much like my having visitors when he's here. Oh! if you only knew the creature as I know him!" that same smile with which she used to thank Swann for some instance of his courtesy which she prized so highly, for some advice for which she had asked him in one of those grave crises in her life, when she could turn to him alone.

Then, to this other Odette, he would ask himself what could have induced him to write that outrageous letter, of which, probably, until then, she had never supposed him capable, a letter which must have lowered him from the high, from the supreme place which, by his generosity, by his loyalty, he had won for himself in her esteem. He would become less dear to her, since it was for those qualities, which she found neither in Forcheville nor in any other, that she loved him. It was for them that Odette so often shewed him a reciprocal kindness, which counted for less than nothing in his moments of jealousy, because it was not a sign of reciprocal desire, was indeed a proof rather of affection than of love, but the importance of which he began once more to feel in proportion as the spontaneous relaxation of his suspicions, often accelerated by the distraction brought to him by reading about art or by the conversation of a friend, rendered his passion less exacting of reciprocities.

Now that, after this swing of the pendulum, Odette had naturally returned to the place from which Swann's jealousy had for the moment driven her, in the angle in which he found her charming, he pictured her to himself as full of tenderness, with a look of consent in her eyes, and so beautiful that he could not refrain from moving his lips towards her, as though she had actually been in the room for him to kiss; and he preserved a sense of gratitude to her for that bewitching, kindly glance, as strong as though she had really looked thus at him, and it had not been merely his imagination that had portrayed it in order to satisfy his desire.

What distress he must have caused her! Certainly he found adequate reasons for his resentment, but they would not have been sufficient to make him feel that resentment, if he had not so passionately loved her. Had he not nourished grievances, just as serious, against other women, to whom he would, none the less, render willing service to-day, feeling no anger towards them because he no longer loved them? If the day ever came when he would find himself in the same state of indifference with regard to Odette, he would then understand that it was his jealousy alone which had led him to find something atrocious, unpardonable, in this desire (after all, so natural a desire, springing from a childlike ingenuousness and also from a certain delicacy in her nature) to be able, in her turn, when an occasion offered, to repay the Verdurins for their hospitality, and to play the hostess in a house of her own.

He returned to the other point of view—opposite to that of his love and of his jealousy, to which he resorted at times by a sort of mental equity, and in order to make allowance for different eventualities—from which he tried to form a fresh judgment of Odette, based on the supposition that he had never been in love with her, that she was to him just a woman like other women, that her life had not been (whenever he himself was not present) different, a texture woven in secret apart from him, and warped against him.

Wherefore believe that she would enjoy down there with Forcheville or with other men intoxicating pleasures which she had never known with him, and which his jealousy alone had fabricated in all their elements? At Bayreuth, as in Paris, if it should happen that Forcheville thought of him at all, it would only be as of some one who counted for a great deal in the life of Odette, some one for whom he was obliged to make way, when they met in her house. If Forcheville and she scored a triumph by being down there together in spite of him, it was he who had engineered that triumph by striving in vain to prevent her from going there, whereas if he had approved of her plan, which for that matter was quite defensible, she would have had the appearance of being there by his counsel, she would have felt herself sent there, housed there by him, and for the pleasure which she derived from entertaining those people who had so often entertained her, it was to him that she would have had to acknowledge her indebtedness.

And if—instead of letting her go off thus, at cross-purposes with him, without having seen him again—he were to send her this money, if he were to encourage her to take this journey, and to go out of his way to make it comfortable and pleasant for her, she would come running to him, happy, grateful, and he would have the joy—the sight of her face—which he had not known for nearly a week, a joy which none other could replace. For the moment that Swann was able to form a picture of her without revulsion, that he could see once again the friendliness in her smile, and that the desire to tear her away from every rival was no longer imposed by his jealousy upon his love, that love once again became, more than anything, a taste for the sensations which Odette's person gave him, for the pleasure which he found in admiring, as one might a spectacle, or in questioning, as one might a phenomenon, the birth of one of her glances, the formation of one of her smiles, the utterance of an intonation of her voice. And this pleasure, different from every other, had in the end created in him a need of her, which she alone, by her presence or by her letters, could assuage, almost as disinterested, almost as artistic, as perverse as another need which characterised this new period in Swann's life, when the sereness, the depression of the preceding years had been followed by a sort of spiritual superabundance, without his knowing to what he owed this unlooked-for enrichment of his life, any more than a person in delicate health who from a certain moment grows stronger, puts on flesh, and seems for a time to be on the road to a complete recovery:—this other need, which, too, developed in him independently of the visible, material world, was the need to listen to music and to learn to know it.

And so, by the chemical process of his malady, after he had created jealousy out of his love, he began again to generate tenderness, pity for Odette. She had become once more the old Odette, charming and kind. He was full of remorse for having treated her harshly. He wished her to come to him, and, before she came, he wished to have already procured for her some pleasure, so as to watch her gratitude taking shape in her face and moulding her smile.

So, too, Odette, certain of seeing him come to her in a few days, as tender and submissive as before, and plead with her for a reconciliation, became inured, was no longer afraid of displeasing him, or even of making him angry, and refused him, whenever it suited her, the favours by which he set most store.

Perhaps she did not realise how sincere he had been with her during their quarrel, when he had told her that he would not send her any money, but would do what he could to hurt her. Perhaps she did not realise, either, how sincere he still was, if not with her, at any rate with himself, on other occasions when, for the sake of their future relations, to shew Odette that he was capable of doing without her, that a rupture was still possible between them, he decided to wait some time before going to see her again.

Sometimes several days had elapsed, during which she had caused him no fresh anxiety; and as, from the next few visits which he would pay her, he knew that he was likely to derive not any great pleasure, but, more probably, some annoyance which would put an end to the state of calm in which he found himself, he wrote to her that he was very busy, and would not be able to see her on any of the days that he had suggested. Meanwhile, a letter from her, crossing his, asked him to postpone one of those very meetings. He asked himself, why; his suspicions, his grief, again took hold of him. He could no longer abide, in the new state of agitation into which he found himself plunged, by the arrangements which he had made in his preceding state of comparative calm; he would run to find her, and would insist upon seeing her on each of the following days. And even if she had not written first, if she merely acknowledged his letter, it was enough to make him unable to rest without seeing her. For, upsetting all Swann's calculations, Odette's acceptance had entirely changed his attitude. Like everyone who possesses something precious, so as to know what would happen if he ceased for a moment to possess it, he had detached the precious object from his mind, leaving, as he thought, everything else in the same state as when it was there. But the absence of one part from a whole is not only that, it is not simply a partial omission, it is a disturbance of all the other parts, a new state which it was impossible to foresee from the old.

But at other times—when Odette was on the point of going away for a holiday—it was after some trifling quarrel for which he had chosen the pretext, that he decided not to write to her and not to see her until her return, giving the appearance (and expecting the reward) of a serious rupture, which she would perhaps regard as final, to a separation, the greater part of which was inevitable, since she was going away, which, in fact, he was merely allowing to start a little sooner than it must. At once he could imagine Odette, puzzled, anxious, distressed at having received neither visit nor letter from him and this picture of her, by calming his jealousy, made it easy for him to break himself of the habit of seeing her. At odd moments, no doubt, in the furthest recesses of his brain, where his determination had thrust it away, and thanks to the length of the interval, the three weeks' separation to which he had agreed, it was with pleasure that he would consider the idea that he would see Odette again on her return; but it was also with so little impatience that he began to ask himself whether he would not readily consent to the doubling of the period of so easy an abstinence. It had lasted, so far, but three days, a much shorter time than he had often, before, passed without seeing Odette, and without having, as on this occasion he had, premeditated a separation. And yet, there and then, some tiny trace of contrariety in his mind, or of weakness in his body,—by inciting him to regard the present as an exceptional moment, one not to be governed by the rules, one in which prudence itself would allow him to take advantage of the soothing effects of a pleasure and to give his will (until the time should come when its efforts might serve any purpose) a holiday—suspended the action of his will, which ceased to exert its inhibitive control; or, without that even, the thought of some information for which he had forgotten to ask Odette, such as if she had decided in what colour she would have her carriage repainted, or, with regard to some investment, whether they were 'ordinary' or 'preference' shares that she wished him to buy (for it was all very well to shew her that he could live without seeing her, but if, after that, the carriage had to be painted over again, if the shares produced no dividend, a fine lot of good he would have done),—and suddenly, like a stretched piece of elastic which is let go, or the air in a pneumatic machine which is ripped open, the idea of seeing her again, from the remote point in time to which it had been attached, sprang back into the field of the present and of immediate possibilities.

It sprang back thus without meeting any further resistance, so irresistible, in fact, that Swann had been far less unhappy in watching the end gradually approaching, day by day, of the fortnight which he must spend apart from Odette, than he was when kept waiting ten minutes while his coachman brought round the carriage which was to take him to her, minutes which he passed in transports of impatience and joy, in which he recaptured a thousand times over, to lavish on it all the wealth of his affection, that idea of his meeting with Odette, which, by so abrupt a repercussion, at a moment when he supposed it so remote, was once more present and on the very surface of his consciousness. The fact was that this idea no longer found, as an obstacle in its course, the desire to contrive without further delay to resist its coming, which had ceased to have any place in Swann's mind since, having proved to himself—or so, at least, he believed—that he was so easily capable of resisting it, he no longer saw any inconvenience in postponing a plan of separation which he was now certain of being able to put into operation whenever he would. Furthermore, this idea of seeing her again came back to him adorned with a novelty, a seductiveness, armed with a virulence, all of which long habit had enfeebled, but which had acquired new vigour during this privation, not of three days but of a fortnight (for a period of abstinence may be calculated, by anticipation, as having lasted already until the final date assigned to it), and had converted what had been, until then, a pleasure in store, which could easily be sacrificed, into an unlooked-for happiness which he was powerless to resist. Finally, the idea returned to him with its beauty enhanced by his own ignorance of what Odette might have thought, might, perhaps, have done on finding that he shewed no sign of life, with the result that he was going now to meet with the entrancing revelation of an Odette almost unknown.

But she, just as she had supposed that his refusal to send her money was only a feint, saw nothing but a pretext in the question which he came, now, to ask her, about the repainting of her carriage, or the purchase of stock. For she could not reconstruct the several phases of these crises through which he passed, and in the general idea which she formed of them she made no attempt to understand their mechanism, looking only to what she knew beforehand, their necessary, never-failing and always identical termination. An imperfect idea (though possibly all the more profound in consequence), if one were to judge it from the point of view of Swann, who would doubtless have considered that Odette failed to understand him, just as a morphinomaniac or a consumptive, each persuaded that he has been thrown back, one by some outside event, at the moment when he was just going to shake himself free from his inveterate habit, the other by an accidental indisposition at the moment when he was just going to be finally cured, feels himself to be misunderstood by the doctor who does not attach the same importance to these pretended contingencies, mere disguises, according to him, assumed, so as to be perceptible by his patients, by the vice of one and the morbid state of the other, which in reality have never ceased to weigh heavily and incurably upon them while they were nursing their dreams of normality and health. And, as a matter of fact, Swann's love had reached that stage at which the physician and (in the case of certain affections) the boldest of surgeons ask themselves whether to deprive a patient of his vice or to rid him of his malady is still reasonable, or indeed possible.

Certainly, of the extent of this love Swann had no direct knowledge. When he sought to measure it, it happened sometimes that he found it diminished, shrunken almost to nothing; for instance, the very moderate liking, amounting almost to dislike, which, in the days before he was in love with Odette, he had felt for her expressive features, her faded complexion, returned on certain days. "Really, I am making distinct headway," he would tell himself on the morrow, "when I come to think it over carefully, I find out that I got hardly any pleasure, last night, out of being in bed with her; it's an odd thing, but I actually thought her ugly." And certainly he was sincere, but his love extended a long way beyond the province of physical desire. Odette's person, indeed, no longer held any great place in it. When his eyes fell upon the photograph of Odette on his table, or when she came to see him, he had difficulty in identifying her face, either in the flesh or on the pasteboard, with the painful and continuous anxiety which dwelt in his mind. He would say to himself, almost with astonishment, "It is she!" as when suddenly some one shews us in a detached, externalised form one of our own maladies, and we find in it no resemblance to what we are suffering. "She?"—he tried to ask himself what that meant; for it is something like love, like death (rather than like those vague conceptions of maladies), a thing which one repeatedly calls in question, in order to make oneself probe further into it, in the fear that the question will find no answer, that the substance will escape our grasp—the mystery of personality. And this malady, which was Swann's love, had so far multiplied, was so closely interwoven with all his habits, with all his actions, with his thoughts, his health, his sleep, his life, even with what he hoped for after his death, was so entirely one with him that it would have been impossible to wrest it away without almost entirely destroying him; as surgeons say, his case was past operation.

By this love Swann had been so far detached from all other interests that when by chance he reappeared in the world of fashion, reminding himself that his social relations, like a beautifully wrought setting (although she would not have been able to form any very exact estimate of its worth), might, still, add a little to his own value in Odette's eyes (as indeed they might have done had they not been cheapened by his love itself, which for Odette depreciated everything that it touched by seeming to denounce such things as less precious than itself), he would feel there, simultaneously with his distress at being in places and among people that she did not know, the same detached sense of pleasure as he would have derived from a novel or a painting in which were depicted the amusements of a leisured class; just as, at home, he used to enjoy the thought of the smooth efficiency of his household, the smartness of his own wardrobe and of his servants' liveries, the soundness of his investments, with the same relish as when he read in Saint-Simon, who was one of his favourite authors, of the machinery of daily life at Versailles, what Mme. de Maintenon ate and drank, or the shrewd avarice and great pomp of Lulli. And in the small extent to which this detachment was not absolute, the reason for this new pleasure which Swann was tasting was that he could emigrate for a moment into those few and distant parts of himself which had remained almost foreign to his love and to his pain. In this respect the personality, with which my great-aunt endowed him, of 'young Swann,' as distinct from the more individual personality of Charles Swann, was that in which he now most delighted. Once when, because it was the birthday of the Princesse de Parme (and because she could often be of use, indirectly, to Odette, by letting her have seats for galas and jubilees and all that sort of thing), he had decided to send her a basket of fruit, and was not quite sure where or how to order it, he had entrusted the task to a cousin of his mother who, delighted to be doing a commission for him, had written to him, laying stress on the fact that she had not chosen all the fruit at the same place, but the grapes from Crapote, whose speciality they were, the strawberries from Jauret, the pears from Chevet, who always had the best, and soon, "every fruit visited and examined, one by one, by myself." And in the sequel, by the cordiality with which the Princess thanked him, he had been able to judge of the flavour of the strawberries and of the ripeness of the pears. But, most of all, that "every fruit visited and examined, one by one, by myself" had brought balm to his sufferings by carrying his mind off to a region which he rarely visited, although it was his by right, as the heir of a rich and respectable middle-class family in which had been handed down from generation to generation the knowledge of the 'right places' and the art of ordering things from shops.

Of a truth, he had too long forgotten that he was 'young Swann' not to feel, when he assumed that part again for a moment, a keener pleasure than he was capable of feeling at other times—when, indeed, he was grown sick of pleasure; and if the friendliness of the middle-class people, for whom he had never been anything else than 'young Swann,' was less animated than that of the aristocrats (though more flattering, for all that, since in the middle-class mind friendship is inseparable from respect), no letter from a Royal Personage, offering him some princely entertainment, could ever be so attractive to Swann as the letter which asked him to be a witness, or merely to be present at a wedding in the family of some old friends of his parents; some of whom had 'kept up' with him, like my grandfather, who, the year before these events, had invited him to my mother's wedding, while others barely knew him by sight, but were, they thought, in duty bound to shew civility to the son, to the worthy successor of the late M. Swann.

But, by virtue of his intimacy, already time-honoured, with so many of them, the people of fashion, in a certain sense, were also a part of his house, his service, and his family. He felt, when his mind dwelt upon his brilliant connections, the same external support, the same solid comfort as when he looked at the fine estate, the fine silver, the fine table-linen which had come down to him from his forebears. And the thought that, if he were seized by a sudden illness and confined to the house, the people whom his valet would instinctively run to find would be the Duc de Chartres, the Prince de Reuss, the Duc de Luxembourg and the Baron de Charlus, brought him the same consolation as our old Françoise derived from the knowledge that she would, one day, be buried in her own fine clothes, marked with her name, not darned at all (or so exquisitely darned that it merely enhanced one's idea of the skill and patience of the seamstress), a shroud from the constant image of which in her mind's eye she drew a certain satisfactory sense, if not actually of wealth and prosperity, at any rate of self-esteem. But most of all,—since in every one of his actions and thoughts which had reference to Odette, Swann was constantly subdued and swayed by the unconfessed feeling that he was, perhaps not less dear, but at least less welcome to her than anyone, even the most wearisome of the Verdurins' 'faithful,'—when he betook himself to a world in which he was the paramount example of taste, a man whom no pains were spared to attract, whom people were genuinely sorry not to see, he began once again to believe in the existence of a happier life, almost to feel an appetite for it, as an invalid may feel who has been in bed for months and on a strict diet, when he picks up a newspaper and reads the account of an official banquet or the advertisement of a cruise round Sicily.

If he was obliged to make excuses to his fashionable friends for not paying them visits, it was precisely for the visits that he did pay her that he sought to excuse himself to Odette. He still paid them (asking himself at the end of each month whether, seeing that he had perhaps exhausted her patience, and had certainly gone rather often to see her, it would be enough if he sent her four thousand francs), and for each visit he found a pretext, a present that he had to bring her, some information which she required, M. de Charlus, whom he had met actually going to her house, and who had insisted upon Swann's accompanying him. And, failing any excuse, he would beg M. de Charlus to go to her at once, and to tell her, as though spontaneously, in the course of conversation, that he had just remembered something that he had to say to Swann, and would she please send a message to Swann's house asking him to come to her then and there; but as a rule Swann waited at home in vain, and M. de Charlus informed him, later in the evening, that his device had not proved successful. With the result that, if she was now frequently away from Paris, even when she was there he scarcely saw her; that she who, when she was in love with him, used to say, "I am always free" and "What can it matter to me, what other people think?" now, whenever he wanted to see her, appealed to the proprieties or pleaded some engagement. When he spoke of going to a charity entertainment, or a private view, or a first-night at which she was to be present, she would expostulate that he wished to advertise their relations in public, that he was treating her like a woman off the streets. Things came to such a pitch that, in an effort to save himself from being altogether forbidden to meet her anywhere, Swann, remembering that she knew and was deeply attached to my great-uncle Adolphe, whose friend he himself also had been; went one day to see him in his little flat in the Rue de Bellechasse, to ask him to use his influence with Odette. As it happened, she invariably adopted, when she spoke to Swann about my uncle, a poetical tone, saying: "Ah, he! He is not in the least like you; it is an exquisite thing, a great, a beautiful thing, his friendship for me. He's not the sort of man who would have so little consideration for me as to let himself be seen with me everywhere in public." This was embarrassing for Swann, who did not know quite to what rhetorical pitch he should screw himself up in speaking of Odette to my uncle. He began by alluding to her excellence, *a priori,* the axiom of her seraphic super-humanity, the revelation of her inexpressible virtues, no conception of which could possibly be formed. "I should like to speak to you about her," he went on, "you, who know what a woman supreme above all women, what an adorable being, what an angel Odette is. But you know, also, what life is in Paris. Everyone doesn't see Odette in the light in which you and I have been privileged to see her. And so there are people who think that I am behaving rather foolishly; she won't even allow me to meet her out of doors, at the theatre. Now you, in whom she has such enormous confidence, couldn't you say a few words for me to her, just to assure her that she exaggerates the harm which my bowing to her in the street might do her?"

My uncle advised Swann not to see Odette for some days, after which she would love him all the more; he advised Odette to let Swann meet her everywhere, and as often as he pleased. A few days later Odette told Swann that she had just had a rude awakening; she had discovered that my uncle was the same as other men; he had tried to take her by assault. She calmed Swann, who, at first, was for rushing out to challenge my uncle to a duel, but he refused to shake hands with him when they met again. He regretted this rupture all the more because he had hoped, if he had met my uncle Adolphe again sometimes and had contrived to talk things over with him in strict confidence, to be able to get him to throw a light on certain rumours with regard to the life that Odette had led, in the old days, at Nice. For my uncle Adolphe used to spend the winter there, and Swann thought that it might indeed have been there, perhaps, that he had first known Odette. The few words which some one had let fall, in his hearing, about a man who, it appeared, had been Odette's lover, had left Swann dumbfoundered. But the very things which he would, before knowing them, have regarded as the most terrible to learn and the most impossible to believe, were, once he knew them, incorporated for all time in the general mass of his sorrow; he admitted them, he could no longer have understood their not existing. Only, each one of them in its passage traced an indelible line, altering the picture that he had formed of his mistress. At one time indeed he felt that he could understand that this moral 'lightness,' of which he would never have suspected Odette, was perfectly well known, and that at Baden or Nice, when she had gone, in the past, to spend several months in one or the other place, she had enjoyed a sort of amorous notoriety. He attempted, in order to question them, to get into touch again with certain men of that stamp; but these were aware that he knew Odette, and, besides, he was afraid of putting the thought of her into their heads, of setting them once more upon her track. But he, to whom, up till then, nothing could have seemed so tedious as was all that pertained to the cosmopolitan life of Baden or of Nice, now that he learned that Odette had, perhaps, led a 'gay' life once in those pleasure-cities, although he could never find out whether it had been solely to satisfy a want of money which, thanks to himself, she no longer felt, or from some capricious instinct which might, at any moment, revive in her, he would lean, in impotent anguish, blinded and dizzy, over the bottomless abyss into which had passed, in which had been engulfed those years of his own, early in MacMahon's *Septennat*, in which one spent the winter on the Promenade des Anglais, the summer beneath the limes of Baden, and would find in those years a sad but splendid profundity, such as a poet might have lent to them; and he would have devoted to the reconstruction of all the insignificant details that made up the daily round on the Côte d'Azur in those days, if it could have helped him to understand something that still baffled him in the smile or in the eyes of Odette, more enthusiasm than does the aesthete who ransacks the extant documents of fifteenth-century Florence, so as to try to penetrate further into the soul of the Primavera, the fair Vanna or the

Venus of Botticelli. He would sit, often, without saying a word to her, only gazing at her and dreaming; and she would comment: "You do look sad!" It was not very long since, from the idea that she was an excellent creature, comparable to the best women that he had known, he had passed to that of her being 'kept'; and yet already, by an inverse process, he had returned from the Odette de Crécy, perhaps too well known to the holiday-makers, to the 'ladies' men' of Nice and Baden, to this face, the expression on which was so often gentle, to this nature so eminently human. He would ask himself: "What does it mean, after all, to say that everyone at Nice knows who Odette de Crécy is? Reputations of that sort, even when they're true, are always based upon other people's ideas"; he would reflect that this legend—even if it were authentic—was something external to Odette, was not inherent in her like a mischievous and ineradicable personality; that the creature who might have been led astray was a woman with frank eyes, a heart full of pity for the sufferings of others, a docile body which he had pressed tightly in his arms and explored with his fingers, a woman of whom he might one day come into absolute possession if he succeeded in making himself indispensable to her. There she was, often tired, her face left blank for the nonce by that eager, feverish preoccupation with the unknown things which made Swann suffer; she would push back her hair with both hands; her forehead, her whole face would seem to grow larger; then, suddenly, some ordinary human thought, some worthy sentiment such as is to be found in all creatures when, in a moment of rest or meditation, they are free to express themselves, would flash out from her eyes like a ray of gold. And immediately the whole of her face would light up like a grey landscape, swathed in clouds which, suddenly, are swept away and the dull scene transfigured, at the moment of the sun's setting. The life which occupied Odette at such times, even the future which she seemed to be dreamily regarding, Swann could have shared with her. No evil disturbance seemed to have left any effect on them. Rare as they became, those moments did not occur in vain. By the process of memory, Swann joined the fragments together, abolished the intervals between them, cast, as in molten gold, the image of an Odette compact of kindness and tranquillity, for whom he was to make, later on (as we shall see in the second part of this story) sacrifices which the other Odette would never have won from him. But how rare those moments were, and how seldom he now saw her! Even in regard to their evening meetings, she would never tell him until the last minute whether she would be able to see him, for, reckoning on his being always free, she wished first to be certain that no one else would offer to come to her. She would plead that she was obliged to wait for an answer which was of the very greatest importance, and if, even after she had made Swann come to her house, any of her friends asked her, half-way through the evening, to join them at some theatre, or at supper afterwards, she would jump for joy and dress herself with all speed. As her toilet progressed, every movement that she made brought Swann nearer to the moment when he would have to part from her, when she would fly off with irresistible force; and when at length she was ready, and, plunging into her mirror a last glance strained and brightened by her anxiety to look well, smeared a little salve on her lips, fixed a stray lock of hair over her brow, and called for her cloak of sky-blue silk with golden tassels, Swann would be looking so wretched that she would be unable to restrain a gesture of impatience as she flung at him: "So that is how you thank me for keeping you here till the last minute! And I thought I was being so nice to you. Well, I shall know better another time!" Sometimes, at the risk of annoying her, he made up his mind that he would find out where she had gone, and even dreamed of a defensive alliance with Forcheville, who might perhaps have been able to tell him. But anyhow, when he knew with whom she was spending the evening, it was very seldom that he could not discover, among all his innumerable acquaintance, some one who knew—if only indirectly—the man with whom she had gone out, and could easily obtain this or that piece of information about him. And while he was writing to one of his friends, asking him to try to get a little light thrown upon some point or other, he would feel a sense of relief on ceasing to vex himself with questions to which there was no answer and transferring to some one else the strain of interrogation. It is true that Swann was little the wiser for such information as he did receive. To know a thing does not enable us, always, to prevent its happening, but after all the things that we know we do hold, if not in our hands, at any rate in our minds, where we can dispose of them as we choose, which gives us the illusion of a sort of power to control them. He was quite happy whenever M. de Charlus was with Odette. He knew that between M. de Charlus and her nothing untoward could ever happen, that when M. de Charlus went anywhere with her, it was out of friendship for himself, and that he would make no difficulty about telling him everything that she had done. Sometimes she had declared so emphatically to Swann that it was impossible for him to see her on a particular evening, she seemed to be looking forward so keenly to some outing, that Swann attached a very real importance to the fact that M. de Charlus was free to accompany her. Next day, without daring to put many questions to M. de Charlus, he would force him, by appearing not quite to understand his first answers, to give him more, after each of which he would feel himself increasingly relieved, for he very soon learned that Odette had spent her evening in the most innocent of dissipations.

"But what do you mean, my dear Mémé, I don't quite understand. . . . You didn't go straight from her house to the Musée Grévin? Surely you went somewhere else first? No? That is very odd! You don't know how amusing you are, my dear Mémé. But what an odd idea of hers to go on to the Chat Noir afterwards; it was her idea, I suppose? No? Yours? That's strange. After all, it wasn't a bad idea; she must have known dozens of people there? No? She never spoke to a soul? How extraordinary! Then you sat there like that, just you and she, all by yourselves? I can picture you, sitting there! You are a worthy fellow, my dear Mémé; I'm exceedingly fond of you."

Swann was now quite at ease. To him, who had so often happened, when talking to friends who knew nothing of his love, friends to whom he hardly listened, to hear certain detached sentences (as, for instance, "I saw Mme.

de Crécy yesterday; she was with a man I didn't know."), sentences which dropped into his heart and passed at once into a solid state, grew hard as stalagmites, and seared and tore him as they lay there irremovable,—how charming, by way of contrast, were the words: "She didn't know a soul; she never spoke to a soul." How freely they coursed through him, how fluid they were, how vaporous, how easy to breathe! And yet, a moment later, he was telling himself that Odette must find him very dull if those were the pleasures that she preferred to his company. And their very insignificance, though it reassured him, pained him as if her enjoyment of them had been an act of treachery.

Even when he could not discover where she had gone, it would have sufficed to alleviate the anguish that he then felt, for which Odette's presence, the charm of her company, was the sole specific (a specific which in the long run served, like many other remedies, to aggravate the disease, but at least brought temporary relief to his sufferings), it would have sufficed, had Odette only permitted him to remain in her house while she was out, to wait there until that hour of her return, into whose stillness and peace would flow, to be mingled and lost there, all memory of those intervening hours which some sorcery, some cursed spell had made him imagine as, somehow, different from the rest. But she would not; he must return home; he forced himself, on the way, to form various plans, ceased to think of Odette; he even reached the stage, while he undressed, of turning over all sorts of happy ideas in his mind: it was with a light heart, buoyed with the anticipation of going to see some favourite work of art on the morrow, that he jumped into bed and turned out the light; but no sooner had he made himself ready to sleep, relaxing a self-control of which he was not even conscious, so habitual had it become, than an icy shudder convulsed his body and he burst into sobs. He did not wish to know why, but dried his eyes, saying with a smile: "This is delightful; I'm becoming neurasthenic." After which he could not save himself from utter exhaustion at the thought that, next day, he must begin afresh his attempt to find out what Odette had been doing, must use all his influence to contrive to see her. This compulsion to an activity without respite, without variety, without result, was so cruel a scourge that one day, noticing a swelling over his stomach, he felt an actual joy in the idea that he had, perhaps, a tumour which would prove fatal, that he need not concern himself with anything further, that it was his malady which was going to govern his life, to make a plaything of him, until the not-distant end. If indeed, at this period, it often happened that, though without admitting it even to himself, he longed for death, it was in order to escape not so much from the keenness of his sufferings as from the monotony of his struggle.

And yet he would have wished to live until the time came when he no longer loved her, when she would have no reason for lying to him, when at length he might learn from her whether, on the day when he had gone to see her in the afternoon, she had or had not been in the arms of Forcheville. Often for several days on end the suspicion that she was in love with some one else would distract his mind from the question of Forcheville, making it almost immaterial to him, like those new developments of a continuous state of ill-health which seem for a little time to have delivered us from their predecessors. There were even days when he was not tormented by any suspicion. He fancied that he was cured. But next morning, when he awoke, he felt in the same place the same pain, a sensation which, the day before, he had, as it were, diluted in the torrent of different impressions. But it had not stirred from its place. Indeed, it was the sharpness of this pain that had awakened him.

Since Odette never gave him any information as to those vastly important matters which took up so much of her time every day (albeit he had lived long enough in the world to know that such matters are never anything else than pleasures) he could not sustain for any length of time the effort to imagine them; his brain would become a void; then he would pass a finger over his tired eyelids, in the same way as he might have wiped his eyeglass, and would cease altogether to think. There emerged, however, from this unexplored tract, certain occupations which reappeared from time to time, vaguely connected by Odette with some obligation towards distant relatives or old friends who, inasmuch as they were the only people whom she was in the habit of mentioning as preventing her from seeing him, seemed to Swann to compose the necessary, unalterable setting of her life. Because of the tone in which she referred, from time to time, to "the day when I go with my friend to the Hippodrome," if, when he felt unwell and had thought, "Perhaps Odette would be kind and come to see me," he remembered, suddenly, that it was one of those very days, he would correct himself with an "Oh, no! It's not worth while asking her to come; I should have thought of it before, this is the day when she goes with her friend to the Hippodrome. We must confine ourselves to what is possible; no use wasting our time in proposing things that can't be accepted and are declined in advance." And this duty that was incumbent upon Odette, of going to the Hippodrome, to which Swann thus gave way, seemed to him to be not merely ineluctable in itself; but the mark of necessity which stamped it seemed to make plausible and legitimate everything that was even remotely connected with it. If, when Odette, in the street, had acknowledged the salute of a passer-by, which had aroused Swann's jealousy, she replied to his questions by associating the stranger with any of the two or three paramount duties of which she had often spoken to him; if, for instance, she said: "That's a gentleman who was in my friend's box the other day; the one I go to the Hippodrome with," that explanation would set Swann's suspicions at rest; it was, after all, inevitable that this friend should have other guests than Odette in her box at the Hippodrome, but he had never sought to form or succeeded in forming any coherent impression of them. Oh! how he would have loved to know her, that friend who went to the Hippodrome, how he would have loved her to invite him there with Odette. How readily he would have sacrified all his acquaintance for no matter what person who was in the habit of seeing Odette, were she but a manicurist or a girl out of a shop. He would have taken more trouble, incurred more expense for them than for queens. Would they not have supplied him, out of what was contained in their knowledge of the life of Odette, with the one potent anodyne for his pain? With what joy would he have hastened to spend his days with one or other of those humble folk with whom Odette kept up friendly relations, either with some ulterior motive or from genuine simplicity of nature. How willingly would he have fixed his abode for ever in the attics of some sordid but enviable house, where Odette went but never took him, and where, if he had lived with the little retired dressmaker, whose lover he would readily have pretended to be, he would have been visited by Odette almost daily. In those regions, that were almost slums, what a modest existence, abject, if you please, but delightful, nourished by tranquillity and happiness, he would have consented to lead indefinitely.

It sometimes happened, again, that, when, after meeting Swann, she saw some man approaching whom he did not know, he could distinguish upon Odette's face that look of sorrow which she had worn on the day when he had come to her while Forcheville was there. But this was rare; for, on the days when, in spite of all that she had to do, and of her dread of what people would think, she did actually manage to see Swann, the predominant quality in her attitude, now, was self-assurance; a striking contrast, perhaps an unconscious revenge for, perhaps a natural reaction from the timorous emotion which, in the early days of their friendship, she had felt in his presence, and even in his absence, when she began a letter to him with the words: "My dear, my hand trembles so that I can scarcely write." (So, at least, she pretended, and a little of that emotion must have been sincere, or she would not have been anxious to enlarge and emphasise it.) So Swann had been pleasing to her then. Our hands do not tremble except for ourselves, or for those whom we love. When they have ceased to control our happiness how peaceful, how easy, how bold do we become in their presence! In speaking to him, in writing to him now, she no longer employed those words by which she had sought to give herself the illusion that he belonged to her, creating opportunities for saying "my" and "mine" when she referred to him: "You are all that I have in the world; it is the perfume of our friendship, I shall keep it," nor spoke to him of the future, of death itself, as of a single adventure which they would have to share. In those early days, whatever he might say to her, she would answer admiringly: "You know, you will never be like other people!"—she would gaze at his long, slightly bald head, of which people who know only of his successes used to think: "He's not regularly good-looking, if you like, but he is smart; that tuft, that eyeglass, that smile!" and, with more curiosity perhaps to know him as he really was than desire to become his mistress, she would sigh:

"I do wish I could find out what there is in that head of yours!"

But, now, whatever he might say, she would answer, in a tone sometimes of irritation, sometimes indulgent: "Ah! so you never will be like other people!"

She would gaze at his head, which was hardly aged at all by his recent anxieties (though people now thought of it, by the same mental process which enables one to discover the meaning of a piece of symphonic music of which one has read the programme, or the 'likenesses' in a child whose family one has known: "He's not positively ugly, if you like, but he is really rather absurd; that eyeglass, that tuft, that smile!" realising in their imagination, fed by suggestion, the invisible boundary which divides, at a few months' interval, the head of an ardent lover from a cuckold's), and would say:

"Oh, I do wish I could change you; put some sense into that head of yours."

Always ready to believe in the truth of what he hoped, if it was only Odette's way of behaving to him that left room for doubt, he would fling himself greedily upon her words: "You can if you like," he would tell her.

And he tried to explain to her that to comfort him, to control him, to make him work would be a noble task, to which numbers of other women asked for nothing better than to be allowed to devote themselves, though it is only fair to add that in those other women's hands the noble task would have seemed to Swann nothing more than an indiscreet and intolerable usurpation of his freedom of action. "If she didn't love me, just a little," he told himself, "she would not wish to have me altered. To alter me, she will have to see me more often." And so he was able to trace, in these faults which she found in him, a proof at least of her interest, perhaps even of her love; and, in fact, she gave him so little, now, of the last, that he was obliged to regard as proofs of her interest in him the various things which, every now and then, she forbade him to do. One day she announced that she did not care for his coachman, who, she thought, was perhaps setting Swann against her, and, anyhow, did not shew that promptness and deference to Swann's orders which she would have liked to see. She felt that he wanted to hear her say: "Don't have him again when you come to me," just as he might have wanted her to kiss him. So, being in a good temper, she said it; and he was deeply moved. That evening, when talking to M. de Charlus, with whom he had the satisfaction of being able to speak of her openly (for the most trivial remarks that he uttered now, even to people who had never heard of her, had always some sort of reference to Odette), he said to him:

"I believe, all the same, that she loves me; she is so nice to me now, and she certainly takes an interest in what I do."

And if, when he was starting off for her house, getting into his carriage with a friend whom he was to drop somewhere on the way, his friend said: "Hullo! that isn't Loredan on the box?" with what melancholy joy would Swann answer him:

"Oh! Good heavens, no! I can tell you, I daren't take Loredan when I go to the Rue La Pérouse; Odette doesn't like me to have Loredan, she thinks he doesn't suit me. What on earth is one to do? Women, you know, women. My dear fellow, she would be furious. Oh, lord, yes; I've only to take Rémi there; I should never hear the last of it!"

These new manners, indifferent, listless, irritable, which Odette now adopted with Swann, undoubtedly made him suffer; but he did not realise how much he suffered; since it had been with a regular progression, day after day, that Odette had chilled towards him, it was only by directly contrasting what she was to-day with what she had been at first that he could have measured the extent of the change that had taken place. Now this change was his deep, his secret wound, which pained him day and night, and whenever he felt that his thoughts were straying too near it, he would quickly turn them into another channel for fear of being made to suffer too keenly. He might say to himself in a vague way: "There was a time when Odette loved me more," but he never formed any definite picture of that time. Just as he had in his study a cupboard at which he contrived never to look, which he turned aside to avoid passing whenever he entered or left the room, because in one of its drawers he had locked away the chrysanthemum which she had given him on one of those first evenings when he had taken her home in his carriage, and the letters in which she said: "Why did you not forget your heart also? I should never have let you have that back," and "At whatever hour of the day or night you may need me, just send me a word, and dispose of me as you please," so there was a place in his heart to which he would never allow his thoughts to trespass too near, forcing them, if need be, to evade it by a long course of reasoning so that they should not have to pass within reach of it; the place in which lingered his memories of happy days.

But his so meticulous prudence was defeated one evening when he had gone out to a party.

It was at the Marquise de Saint-Euverte's, on the last, for that season, of the evenings on which she invited people to listen to the musicians who would serve, later on, for her charity concerts. Swann, who had intended to go to each of the previous evenings in turn, but had never been able to make up his mind, received, while he was dressing for this party, a visit from the Baron de Charlus, who came with an offer to go with him to the Marquise's, if his company could be of any use in helping Swann not to feel quite so bored when he got there, to be a little less unhappy. But Swann had thanked him with:

"You can't conceive how glad I should be of your company. But the greatest pleasure that you can give me will be if you will go instead to see Odette. You know what a splendid influence you have over her. I don't suppose she'll be going anywhere this evening, unless she goes to see her old dressmaker, and I'm sure she would be delighted if you went with her there. In any case, you'll find her at home before then. Try to keep her amused, and also to give her a little sound advice. If you could arrange something for to-morrow which would please her, something that we could all three do together. Try to put out a feeler, too, for the summer; see if there's anything she wants to do, a cruise that we might all three take; anything you can think of. I don't count upon seeing her to-night, myself; still if she would like me to come, or if you find a loophole, you've only to send me a line at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's up till midnight; after that I shall be here. Ever so many thanks for all you are doing for me—you know what I feel about you!"

His friend promised to go and do as Swann wished as soon as he had deposited him at the door of the Saint-Euverte house, where he arrived soothed by the thought that M. de Charlus would be spending the evening in the Rue La Pérouse, but in a state of melancholy indifference to everything that did not involve Odette, and in particular to the details of fashionable life, a state which invested them with the charm that is to be found in anything which, being no longer an object of our desire, appears to us in its own guise. On alighting from his carriage, in the foreground of that fictitious summary of their domestic existence which hostesses are pleased to offer to their guests on ceremonial occasions, and in which they shew a great regard for accuracy of costume and setting, Swann was amused to discover the heirs and successors of Balzac's 'tigers'—now 'grooms'—who normally followed their mistress when she walked abroad, but now, hatted and booted, were posted out of doors, in front of the house on the gravelled drive, or outside the stables, as gardeners might be drawn up for inspection at the ends of their several flower-beds. The peculiar tendency which he had always had to look for analogies between living people and the portraits in galleries reasserted itself here, but in a more positive and more general form; it was society as a whole, now that he was detached from it, which presented itself to him in a series of pictures. In the cloak-room, into which, in the old days, when he was still a man of fashion, he would have gone in his overcoat, to emerge from it in evening dress, but without any impression of what had occurred there, his mind having been, during the minute or two that he had spent in it, either still at the party which he had just left, or already at the party into which he was just about to be ushered, he now noticed, for the first time, roused by the unexpected arrival of so belated a guest, the scattered pack of splendid effortless animals, the enormous footmen who were drowsing here and there upon benches and chests, until, pointing their noble greyhound profiles, they towered upon their feet and gathered in a circle round about him.

One of them, of a particularly ferocious aspect, and not unlike the headsman in certain Renaissance pictures which represent executions, tortures, and the like, advanced upon him with an implacable air to take his 'things.' But the harshness of his steely glare was compensated by the softness of his cotton gloves, so effectively that, as he approached Swann, he seemed to be exhibiting at once an utter contempt for his person and the most tender regard for his hat. He took it with a care to which the precision of his movements imparted something that was almost over-fastidious, and with a delicacy that was rendered almost touching by the evidence of his splendid strength. Then he passed it to one of his satellites, a novice and timid, who was expressing the panic that overpowered him by casting furious glances in every direction, and displayed all the dumb agitation of a wild animal in the first hours of its captivity.

A few feet away, a strapping great lad in livery stood musing, motionless, statuesque, useless, like that purely decorative warrior whom one sees in the most tumultuous of Mantegna's paintings, lost in dreams, leaning upon his shield, while all around him are fighting and bloodshed and death; detached from the group of his companions who were thronging about Swann, he seemed as determined to remain unconcerned in the scene, which he followed vaguely with his cruel, greenish eyes, as if it had been the Massacre of the Innocents or the Martyrdom of Saint James. He seemed precisely to have sprung from that vanished race—if, indeed, it ever existed, save in the reredos of San Zeno and the frescoes of the Eremitani, where Swann had come in contact with it, and where it still dreams—fruit of the impregnation of a classical statue by some one of the Master's Paduan models, or of Albert Dürer's Saxons. And the locks of his reddish hair, crinkled by nature, but glued to his head by brilliantine, were treated broadly as they are in that Greek sculpture which the Mantuan painter never ceased to study, and which, if in its creator's purpose it represents but man, manages at least to extract from man's simple outlines such a variety of richness, borrowed, as it were, from the whole of animated nature, that a head of hair, by the glossy undulation and beak-like points of its curls, or in the overlaying of the florid triple diadem of its brushed tresses, can suggest at once a bunch of seaweed, a brood of fledgling doves, a bed of hyacinths and a serpent's writhing back. Others again, no less colossal, were disposed upon the steps of a monumental staircase which, by their decorative presence and marmorean immobility, was made worthy to be named, like that god-crowned ascent in the Palace of the Doges, the 'Staircase of the Giants,' and on which Swann now set foot, saddened by the thought that Odette had never climbed it. Ah, with what joy would he, on the other hand, have raced up the dark, evil-smelling, breakneck flights to the little dressmaker's, in whose attic he would so gladly have paid the price of a weekly stage-box at the Opera for the right to spend the evening there when Odette came, and other days too, for the privilege of talking about her, of living among people whom she was in the habit of seeing when he was not there, and who, on that account, seemed to keep secret among themselves some part of the life of his mistress more real, more inaccessible and more mysterious than anything that he knew. Whereas upon that pestilential, enviable staircase to the old dressmaker's, since there was no other, no service stair in the building, one saw in the evening outside every door an empty, unwashed milk-can set out, in readiness for the morning round, upon the door-mat; on the despicable, enormous staircase which Swann was at that moment climbing, on either side of him, at different levels, before each anfractuosity made in its walls by the window of the porter's lodge or the entrance to a set of rooms, representing the departments of indoor service which they controlled, and doing homage for them to the guests, a gate-keeper, a major-domo, a steward (worthy men who spent the rest of the week in semi-independence in their own domains, dined there by themselves like small shopkeepers, and might to-morrow lapse to the plebeian service of some successful doctor or industrial magnate), scrupulous in carrying out to the letter all the instructions that had been heaped upon them before they were allowed to don the brilliant livery which they wore only at long intervals, and in which they did not feel altogether at their ease, stood each in the arcade of his doorway, their splendid pomp tempered by a democratic good-fellowship, like saints in their niches, and a gigantic usher, dressed Swiss Guard fashion, like the beadle in a church, struck the pavement with his staff as each fresh arrival passed him. Coming to the top of the staircase, up which he had been followed by a servant with a pallid countenance and a small pigtail clubbed at the back of his head, like one of Goya's sacristans or a tabellion in an old play, Swann passed by an office in which the lackeys, seated like notaries before their massive registers, rose solemnly to their feet and inscribed his name. He next crossed a little hall which—just as certain rooms are arranged by their owners to serve as the setting for a single work of art (from which they take their name), and, in their studied bareness, contain nothing else besides—displayed to him as he entered it, like some priceless effigy by Benvenuto Cellini of an armed watchman, a young footman, his body slightly bent forward, rearing above his crimson gorget an even more crimson face, from which seemed to burst forth torrents of fire, timidity and zeal, who, as he pierced the Aubusson tapestries that screened the door of the room in which the music was being given with his impetuous, vigilant, desperate gaze, appeared, with a soldierly impassibility or a supernatural faith—an allegory of alarums, incarnation of alertness, commemoration of a riot—to be looking out, angel or sentinel, from the tower of dungeon or cathedral, for the approach of the enemy or for the hour of Judgment. Swann had now only to enter the concert-room, the doors of which were thrown open to him by an usher loaded with chains, who bowed low before him as though tendering to him the keys of a conquered city. But he thought of the house in which at that very moment he might have been, if Odette had but permitted, and the remembered glimpse of an empty milk-can upon a door-mat wrung his heart.

He speedily recovered his sense of the general ugliness of the human male when, on the other side of the tapestry curtain, the spectacle of the servants gave place to that of the guests. But even this ugliness of faces, which of course were mostly familiar to him, seemed something new and uncanny, now that their features,—instead of being to him symbols of practical utility in the identification of this or that man, who until then had represented merely so many pleasures to be sought after, boredoms to be avoided, or courtesies to be acknowledged—were at rest, measurable by aesthetic co-ordinates alone, in the autonomy of their curves and angles. And in these men, in the thick of whom Swann now found himself packed, there was nothing (even to the monocle which many of them wore, and which, previously, would, at the most, have enabled Swann to say that so-and-so wore a monocle) which, no longer restricted to the general connotation of a habit, the same in all of them, did not now strike him with a sense of individuality in each. Perhaps because he did not regard General de Froberville and the Marquis de Bréauté, who were talking together just inside the door, as anything more than two figures in a picture, whereas they were the old and useful friends who had put him up for the Jockey Club and had supported him in duels, the General's monocle, stuck like a shell-splinter in his common, scarred, victorious, overbearing face, in the middle of a forehead which it left half-blinded, like the single-eyed flashing front of the Cyclops, appeared to Swann as a monstrous wound which it might have been glorious to receive but which it was certainly not decent to expose, while that which M. de Bréauté wore, as a festive badge, with his pearl-grey gloves, his crush hat and white tie, substituting it for the familiar pair of glasses (as Swann himself did) when he went out to places, bore, glued to its other side, like a specimen prepared on a slide for the microscope, an infinitesimal gaze that swarmed with friendly feeling and never ceased to twinkle at the loftiness of ceilings, the delightfulness of parties, the interestingness of programmes and the excellence of refreshments.

"Hallo! you here! why, it's ages since I've seen you," the General greeted Swann and, noticing the look of strain on his face and concluding that it was perhaps a serious illness that had kept him away, went on, "You're looking well, old man!" while M. de Bréauté turned with, "My dear fellow, what on earth are you doing here?" to a 'society novelist' who had just fitted into the angle of eyebrow and cheek his own monocle, the sole instrument that he used in his psychological investigations and remorseless analyses of character, and who now replied, with an air of mystery and importance, rolling the 'r':—"I am observing!"

The Marquis de Forestelle's monocle was minute and rimless, and, by enforcing an incessant and painful contraction of the eye over which it was incrusted like a superfluous cartilage, the presence of which there was inexplicable and its substance unimaginable, it gave to his face a melancholy refinement, and led women to suppose him capable of suffering terribly when in love. But that of M. de Saint-Candé, girdled, like Saturn, with an enormous ring, was the centre of gravity of a face which composed itself afresh every moment in relation to the glass, while his thrusting red nose and swollen sarcastic lips endeavoured by their grimaces to rise to the level of the steady flame of wit that sparkled in the polished disk, and saw itself preferred to the most ravishing eyes in the world by the smart, depraved young women whom it set dreaming of artificial charms and a refinement of sensual bliss; and then, behind him, M. de Palancy, who with his huge carp's head and goggling eyes moved slowly up and down the stream of festive gatherings, unlocking his great mandibles at every moment as though in search of his orientation, had the air of carrying about upon his person only an accidental and perhaps purely symbolical fragment of the glass wall of his aquarium, a part intended to suggest the whole which recalled to Swann, a fervent admirer of Giotto's Vices and Virtues at Padua, that Injustice by whose side a leafy bough evokes the idea of the forests that enshroud his secret lair.

Swann had gone forward into the room, under pressure from Mme. de Saint-Euverte and in order to listen to an aria from *Orfeo* which was being rendered on the flute, and had taken up a position in a corner from which, unfortunately, his horizon was bounded by two ladies of 'uncertain' age, seated side by side, the Marquise de Cambremer and the Vicomtesse de Franquetot, who, because they were cousins, used to spend their time at parties in wandering through the rooms, each clutching her bag and followed by her daughter, hunting for one another like people at a railway station, and could never be at rest until they had reserved, by marking them with their fans or handkerchiefs, two adjacent chairs; Mme. de Cambremer, since she knew scarcely anyone, being all the more glad of a companion, while Mme. de Franquetot, who, on the contrary, was extremely popular, thought it effective and original to shew all her fine friends that she preferred to their company that of an obscure country cousin with whom she had childish memories in common. Filled with ironical melancholy, Swann watched them as they listened to the pianoforte intermezzo (Liszt's 'Saint Francis preaching to the birds') which came after the flute, and followed the virtuoso in his dizzy flight; Mme. de Franquetot anxiously, her eyes starting from her head, as though the keys over which his fingers skipped with such agility were a series of trapezes, from any one of which he might come crashing, a hundred feet, to the ground, stealing now and then a glance of astonishment and unbelief at her companion, as who should say: "It isn't possible, I would never have believed that a human being could do all that!"; Mme. de Cambremer, as a woman who had received a sound musical education, beating time with her head—transformed for the nonce into the pendulum of a metronome, the sweep and rapidity of whose movements from one shoulder to the other (performed with that look of wild abandonment in her eye which a sufferer shews who is no longer able to analyse his pain, nor anxious to master it, and says merely "I can't help it") so increased that at every moment her diamond earrings caught in the trimming of her bodice, and she was obliged to put straight the bunch of black grapes which she had in her hair, though without any interruption of her constantly accelerated motion. On the other side (and a little way in front) of Mme. de Franquetot, was the Marquise de Gallardon, absorbed in her favourite meditation, namely upon her own kinship with the Guermantes family, from which she derived both publicly and in private a good deal of glory not unmingled with shame, the most brilliant ornaments of that house remaining somewhat aloof from her, perhaps because she was just a tiresome old woman, or because she was a scandalous old woman, or because she came of an inferior branch of the family, or very possibly for no reason at all. When she found herself seated next to some one whom she did not know, as she was at this moment next to Mme. de Franquetot, she suffered acutely from the feeling that her own consciousness of her Guermantes connection could not be made externally manifest in visible characters, like those which, in the mosaics in Byzantine churches, placed one beneath another, inscribe in a vertical column by the side of some Sacred Personage the words which he is supposed to be uttering. At this moment she was pondering the fact that she had never received an invitation, or even a call, from her young cousin the Princesse des Laumes, during the six years that had already elapsed since the latter's marriage. The thought filled her with anger—and with pride; for, by virtue of having told everyone who expressed surprise at never seeing her at Mme. des Laumes's, that it was because of the risk of meeting the Princesse Mathilde there—a degradation which her own family, the truest and bluest of Legitimists, would never have forgiven her, she had come gradually to believe that this actually was the reason for her not visiting her young cousin. She remembered, it is true, that she had several times inquired of Mme. des Laumes how they might contrive to meet, but she remembered it only in a confused way, and besides did more than neutralise this slightly humiliating reminiscence by murmuring, "After all, it isn't for me to take the first step; I am at least twenty years older than she is." And fortified by these unspoken words she flung her shoulders proudly back until they seemed to part company with her bust, while her head, which lay almost horizontally upon them, made one think of the 'stuck-on' head of a pheasant which is brought to the table regally adorned with its feathers. Not that she in the least degree resembled a pheasant, having been endowed by nature with a short and squat and masculine figure; but successive mortifications had given her a backward tilt, such as one may observe in trees which have taken root on the very edge of a precipice and are forced to grow backwards to preserve their balance. Since she was obliged, in order to console herself for not being quite on a level with the rest of the Guermantes, to repeat to herself incessantly that it was owing to the uncompromising rigidity of her principles and pride that she saw so little of them, the constant iteration had gradually remoulded her body, and had given her a sort of 'bearing' which was accepted by the plebeian as a sign of breeding, and even kindled, at times, a momentary spark in the jaded eyes of old gentlemen in clubs. Had anyone subjected Mme. de Gallardon's conversation to that form of analysis which by noting the relative frequency of its several terms would furnish him with the key to a ciphered message, he would at once have remarked that no expression, not even the commonest forms of speech, occurred in it nearly so often as "at my cousins the Guermantes's," "at my aunt Guermantes's," "Elzéar de Guermantes's health," "my cousin Guermantes's box." If anyone spoke to her of a distinguished personage, she would reply that, although she was not personally acquainted with him, she had seen him hundreds of times at her aunt Guermantes's, but she would utter this reply in so icy a tone, with such a hollow sound, that it was at once quite clear that if she did not know the celebrity personally that was because of all the obstinate, ineradicable principles against which her arching shoulders were stretched back to rest, as on one of those ladders on which gymnastic instructors make us 'extend' so as to develop the expansion of our chests.

At this moment the Princesse des Laumes, who had not been expected to appear at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's that evening, did in fact arrive. To shew that she did not wish any special attention, in a house to which she had come by an act of condescension, to be paid to her superior rank, she had entered the room with her arms pressed close to her sides, even when there was no crowd to be squeezed through, no one attempting to get past her; staying purposely at the back, with the air of being in her proper place, like a king who stands in the waiting procession at the doors of a theatre where the management have not been warned of his coming; and strictly limiting her field of vision—so as not to seem to be advertising her presence and claiming the consideration that was her due—to the study of a pattern in the carpet or of her own skirt, she stood there on the spot which had struck her as the most modest (and from which, as she very well knew, a cry of rapture from Mme. de Saint-Euverte would extricate her as soon as her presence there was noticed), next to Mme. de Cambremer, whom, however, she did not know. She observed the dumbshow by which her neighbour was expressing her passion for music, but she refrained from copying it. This was not to say that, for once that she had consented to spend a few minutes in Mme. de Saint-Euverte's house, the Princesse des Laumes would not have wished (so that the act of politeness to her hostess which she had performed by coming might, so to speak, 'count double') to shew herself as friendly and obliging as possible. But she had a natural horror of what she called 'exaggerating,' and always made a point of letting people see that she 'simply must not' indulge in any display of emotion that was not in keeping with the tone of the circle in which she moved, although such displays never failed to make an impression upon her, by virtue of that spirit of imitation, akin to timidity, which is developed in the most self-confident persons, by contact with an unfamiliar environment, even though it be inferior to their own. She began to ask herself whether these gesticulations might not, perhaps, be a necessary concomitant of the piece of music that was being played, a piece which, it might be, was in a different category from all the music that she had ever heard before; and whether to abstain from them was not a sign of her own inability to understand the music, and of discourtesy towards the lady of the house; with the result that, in order to express by a compromise both of her contradictory inclinations in turn, at one moment she would merely straighten her shoulder-straps or feel in her golden hair for the little balls of coral or of pink enamel, frosted with tiny diamonds, which formed its simple but effective ornament, studying, with a cold interest, her impassioned neighbour, while at another she would beat time for a few bars with her fan, but, so as not to forfeit her independence, she would beat a different time from the pianist's. When he had finished the Liszt Intermezzo and had begun a Prelude by Chopin, Mme. de Cambremer turned to Mme. de Franquetot with a tender smile, full of intimate reminiscence, as well as of satisfaction (that of a competent judge) with the performance. She had been taught in her girlhood to fondle and cherish those long-necked, sinuous creatures, the phrases of Chopin, so free, so flexible, so tactile, which begin by seeking their ultimate resting-place somewhere beyond and far wide of the direction in which they started, the point which one might have expected them to reach, phrases which divert themselves in those fantastic bypaths only to return more deliberately—with a more premeditated reaction, with more precision, as on a crystal bowl which, if you strike it, will ring and throb until you cry aloud in anguish—to clutch at one's heart.

Brought up in a provincial household with few friends or visitors, hardly ever invited to a ball, she had fuddled her mind, in the solitude of her old manor-house, over setting the pace, now crawling-slow, now passionate, whirling, breathless, for all those imaginary waltzing couples, gathering them like flowers, leaving the ball-room for a moment to listen, where the wind sighed among the pine-trees, on the shore of the lake, and seeing of a sudden advancing towards her, more different from anything one had ever dreamed of than earthly lovers are, a slender young man, whose voice was resonant and strange and false, in white gloves. But nowadays the old-fashioned beauty of this music seemed to have become a trifle stale. Having forfeited, some years back, the esteem of 'really musical' people, it had lost its distinction and its charm, and even those whose taste was frankly bad had ceased to find in it more than a moderate pleasure to which they hardly liked to confess. Mme. de Cambremer cast a furtive glance behind her. She knew that her young daughter-in-law (full of respect for her new and noble family, except in such matters as related to the intellect, upon which, having 'got as far' as Harmony and the Greek alphabet, she was specially enlightened) despised Chopin, and fell quite ill when she heard him played. But finding herself free from the scrutiny of this Wagnerian, who was sitting, at some distance, in a group of her own contemporaries, Mme. de Cambremer let herself drift upon a stream of exquisite memories and sensations. The Princesse des Laumes was touched also. Though without any natural gift for music, she had received, some fifteen years earlier, the instruction which a music-mistress of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, a woman of genius who had been, towards the end of her life, reduced to penury, had started, at seventy, to give to the daughters and granddaughters of her old pupils. This lady was now dead. But her method, an echo of her charming touch, came to life now and then in the fingers of her pupils, even of those who had been in other respects quite mediocre, had given up music, and hardly ever opened a piano. And so Mme. des Laumes could let her head sway to and fro, fully aware of the cause, with a perfect appreciation of the manner in which the pianist was rendering this Prelude, since she knew it by heart. The closing notes of the phrase that he had begun sounded already on her lips. And she murmured "How charming it is!" with a stress on the opening consonants of the adjective, a token of her refinement by which she felt her lips so romantically compressed, like the petals of a beautiful, budding flower, that she instinctively brought her eyes into harmony, illuminating them for a moment with a vague and sentimental gaze. Meanwhile Mme. de Gallardon had arrived at the point of saying to herself how annoying it was that she had so few opportunities of meeting the Princesse des Laumes, for she meant to teach her a lesson by not acknowledging her bow. She did not know that her cousin was in the room. A movement of Mme. Franquetot's head disclosed the Princess. At once Mme. de Gallardon dashed towards her, upsetting all her neighbours; although determined to preserve a distant and glacial manner which should remind everyone present that she had no desire to remain on friendly terms with a person in whose house one might find oneself, any day, cheek by jowl with the Princesse Mathilde, and to whom it was not her duty to make advances since she was not 'of her generation,' she felt bound to modify this air of dignity and reserve by some non-committal remark which would justify her overture and would force the Princess to engage in conversation; and so, when she reached her cousin, Mme. de Gallardon, with a stern countenance and one hand thrust out as though she were trying to 'force' a card, began with: "How is your husband?" in the same anxious tone that she would have used if the Prince had been seriously ill. The Princess, breaking into a laugh which was one of her characteristics, and was intended at once to shew the rest of an assembly that she was making fun of some one and also to enhance her own beauty by concentrating her features around her animated lips and sparkling eyes, answered: "Why, he's never been better in his life!" And she went on laughing.

Mme. de Gallardon then drew herself up and, chilling her expression still further, perhaps because she was still uneasy about the Prince's health, said to her cousin:

"Oriane," (at once Mme. des Laumes looked with amused astonishment towards an invisible third, whom she seemed to call to witness that she had never authorised Mme. de Gallardon to use her Christian name) "I should be so pleased if you would look in, just for a minute, to-morrow evening, to hear a quintet, with the clarinet, by Mozart. I should like to have your opinion of it."

She seemed not so much to be issuing an invitation as to be asking a favour, and to want the Princess's opinion of the Mozart quintet just as though it had been a dish invented by a new cook, whose talent it was most important that an epicure should come to judge.

"But I know that quintet quite well. I can tell you now—that I adore it."

"You know, my husband isn't at all well; it's his liver. He would like so much to see you," Mme. de Gallardon resumed, making it now a corporal work of charity for the Princess to appear at her party.

The Princess never liked to tell people that she would not go to their houses. Every day she would write to express her regret at having been kept away—by the sudden arrival of her husband's mother, by an invitation from his brother, by the Opera, by some excursion to the country—from some party to which she had never for a moment dreamed of going. In this way she gave many people the satisfaction of feeling that she was on intimate terms with them, that she would gladly have come to their houses, and that she had been prevented from doing so only by some princely occurrence which they were flattered to find competing with their own humble entertainment. And then, as she belonged to that witty 'Guermantes set'—in which there survived something of the alert mentality, stripped of all commonplace phrases and conventional sentiments, which dated from Mérimée, and found its final expression in the plays of Meilhac and Halévy—she adapted its formula so as to suit even her social engagements, transposed it into the courtesy which was always struggling to be positive and precise, to approximate itself to the plain truth. She would never develop at any length to a hostess the expression of her anxiety to be present at her party; she found it more pleasant to disclose to her all the various little incidents on which it would depend whether it was or was not possible for her to come.

"Listen, and I'll explain," she began to Mme. de Gallardon. "To-morrow evening I must go to a friend of mine, who has been pestering me to fix a day for ages. If she takes us to the theatre afterwards, then I can't possibly come to you, much as I should love to; but if we just stay in the house, I know there won't be anyone else there, so I can slip away."

"Tell me, have you seen your friend M. Swann?"

"No! my precious Charles! I never knew he was here. Where is he? I must catch his eye."

"It's a funny thing that he should come to old Saint-Euverte's," Mme.

de Gallardon went on. "Oh, I know he's very clever," meaning by that 'very cunning,' "but that makes no difference; fancy a Jew here, and she the sister and sister-in-law of two Archbishops."

"I am ashamed to confess that I am not in the least shocked," said the Princesse des Laumes.

"I know he's a converted Jew, and all that, and his parents and grandparents before him. But they do say that the converted ones are worse about their religion than the practising ones, that it's all just a pretence; is that true, d'you think?"

"I can throw no light at all on the matter."

The pianist, who was 'down' to play two pieces by Chopin, after finishing the Prelude had at once attacked a Polonaise. But once Mme. de Gallardon had informed her cousin that Swann was in the room, Chopin himself might have risen from the grave and played all his works in turn without Mme. des Laumes's paying him the slightest attention. She belonged to that one of the two divisions of the human race in which the untiring curiosity which the other half feels about the people whom it does not know is replaced by an unfailing interest in the people whom it does. As with many women of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, the presence, in any room in which she might find herself, of another member of her set, even although she had nothing in particular to say to him, would occupy her mind to the exclusion of every other consideration. From that moment, in the hope that Swann would catch sight of her, the Princess could do nothing but (like a tame white mouse when a lump of sugar is put down before its nose and then taken away) turn her face, in which were crowded a thousand signs of intimate connivance, none of them with the least relevance to the sentiment underlying Chopin's music, in the direction where Swann was, and, if he moved, divert accordingly the course of her magnetic smile.

"Oriane, don't be angry with me," resumed Mme. de Gallardon, who could never restrain herself from sacrificing her highest social ambitions, and the hope that she might one day emerge into a light that would dazzle the world, to the immediate and secret satisfaction of saying something disagreeable, "people do say about your M. Swann that he's the sort of man one can't have in the house; is that true?"

"Why, you, of all people, ought to know that it's true," replied the Princesse des Laumes, "for you must have asked him a hundred times, and he's never been to your house once."

And leaving her cousin mortified afresh, she broke out again into a laugh which scandalised everyone who was trying to listen to the music, but attracted the attention of Mme. de Saint-Euverte, who had stayed, out of politeness, near the piano, and caught sight of the Princess now for the first time. Mme. de Saint-Euverte was all the more delighted to see Mme. des Laumes, as she imagined her to be still at Guermantes, looking after her father-in-law, who was ill.

"My dear Princess, you here?"

"Yes, I tucked myself away in a corner, and I've been hearing such lovely things."

"What, you've been in the room quite a time?"

"Oh, yes, quite a long time, which seemed very short; it was only long because I couldn't see you."

Mme. de Saint-Euverte offered her own chair to the Princess, who declined it with:

"Oh, please, no! Why should you? It doesn't matter in the least where I sit." And deliberately picking out, so as the better to display the simplicity of a really great lady, a low seat without a back: "There now, that hassock, that's all I want. It will make me keep my back straight. Oh! Good heavens, I'm making a noise again; they'll be telling you to have me 'chucked out'."

Meanwhile, the pianist having doubled his speed, the emotion of the music-lovers was reaching its climax, a servant was handing refreshments about on a salver, and was making the spoons rattle, and, as on every other 'party-night', Mme. de Saint-Euverte was making signs to him, which he never saw, to leave the room. A recent bride, who had been told that a young woman ought never to appear bored, was smiling vigorously, trying to catch her hostess's eye so as to flash a token of her gratitude for the other's having 'thought of her' in connection with so delightful an entertainment. And yet, although she remained more calm than Mme. de Franquetot, it was not without some uneasiness that she followed the flying fingers; what alarmed her being not the pianist's fate but the piano's, on which a lighted candle, jumping at each *fortissimo,* threatened, if not to set its shade on fire, at least to spill wax upon the ebony. At last she could contain herself no longer, and, running up the two steps of the platform on which the piano stood, flung herself on the candle to adjust its sconce. But scarcely had her hand come within reach of it when, on a final chord, the piece finished, and the pianist rose to his feet. Nevertheless the bold initiative shewn by this young woman and the moment of blushing confusion between her and the pianist which resulted from it, produced an impression that was favourable on the whole.

"Did you see what that girl did just now, Princess?" asked General de Froberville, who had come up to Mme. des Laumes as her hostess left her for a moment. "Odd, wasn't it? Is she one of the performers?"

"No, she's a little Mme. de Cambremer," replied the Princess carelessly, and then, with more animation: "I am only repeating what I heard just now, myself; I haven't the faintest notion who said it, it was some one behind me who said that they were neighbours of Mme. de Saint-Euverte in the country, but I don't believe anyone knows them, really. They must be 'country cousins'! By the way, I don't know whether you're particularly 'well-up' in the brilliant society which we see before us, because I've no idea who all these astonishing people can be. What do you suppose they do with themselves when they're not at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's parties? She must have ordered them in with the musicians and the chairs and the food. 'Universal providers,' you know. You must admit, they're rather splendid, General. But can she really have the courage to hire the same 'supers' every week? It isn't possible!"

"Oh, but Cambremer is quite a good name; old, too," protested the General.

"I see no objection to its being old," the Princess answered dryly, "but whatever else it is it's not euphonious," she went on, isolating the word euphonious as though between inverted commas, a little affectation to which the Guermantes set were addicted.

"You think not, eh! She's a regular little peach, though," said the General, whose eyes never strayed from Mme. de Cambremer. "Don't you agree with me, Princess?"

"She thrusts herself forward too much; I think, in so young a woman, that's not very nice—for I don't suppose she's my generation," replied Mme. des Laumes (the last word being common, it appeared, to Gallardon and Guermantes). And then, seeing that M. de Froberville was still gazing at Mme. de Cambremer, she added, half out of malice towards the lady, half wishing to oblige the General: "Not very nice . . . for her husband! I am sorry that I do not know her, since she seems to attract you so much; I might have introduced you to her," said the Princess, who, if she had known the young woman, would most probably have done nothing of the sort. "And now I must say good night, because one of my friends is having a birthday party, and I must go and wish her many happy returns," she explained, modestly and with truth, reducing the fashionable gathering to which she was going to the simple proportions of a ceremony which would be boring in the extreme, but at which she was obliged to be present, and there would be something touching about her appearance. "Besides, I must pick up Basin. While I've been here, he's gone to see those friends of his—you know them too, I'm sure,—who are called after a bridge—oh, yes, the Iénas."

"It was a battle before it was a bridge, Princess; it was a victory!" said the General. "I mean to say, to an old soldier like me," he went on, wiping his monocle and replacing it, as though he were laying a fresh dressing on the raw wound underneath, while the Princess instinctively looked away, "that Empire nobility, well, of course, it's not the same thing, but, after all, taking it as it is, it's very fine of its kind; they were people who really did fight like heroes."

"But I have the deepest respect for heroes," the Princess assented, though with a faint trace of irony. "If I don't go with Basin to see this Princesse d'Iéna, it isn't for that, at all; it's simply because I don't know them. Basin knows them; he worships them. Oh, no, it's not what you think; he's not in love with her. I've nothing to set my face against! Besides, what good has it ever done when I have set my face against them?" she queried sadly, for the whole world knew that, ever since the day upon which the Prince des Laumes had married his fascinating cousin, he had been consistently unfaithful to her. "Anyhow, it isn't that at all. They're people he has known for ever so long, they do him very well, and that suits me down to the ground. But I must tell you what he's told me about their house; it's quite enough. Can you imagine it, all their furniture is 'Empire'!"

"But, my dear Princess, that's only natural; it belonged to their grandparents."

"I don't quite say it didn't, but that doesn't make it any less ugly. I quite understand that people can't always have nice things, but at least they needn't have things that are merely grotesque. What do you say? I can think of nothing more devastating, more utterly smug than that hideous style—cabinets covered all over with swans' heads, like bath-taps!"

"But I believe, all the same, that they've got some lovely things; why, they must have that famous mosaic table on which the Treaty of . . ."

"Oh, I don't deny, they may have things that are interesting enough from the historic point of view. But things like that can't, ever, be beautiful . . . because they're simply horrible! I've got things like that myself, that came to Basin from the Montesquious. Only, they're up in the attics at Guermantes, where nobody ever sees them. But, after all, that's not the point, I would fly to see them, with Basin; I would even go to see them among all their sphinxes and brasses, if I knew them, but—I don't know them! D'you know, I was always taught, when I was a little girl, that it was not polite to call on people one didn't know." She assumed a tone of childish gravity. "And so I am just doing what I was taught to do. Can't you see those good people, with a totally strange woman bursting into their house? Why, I might get a most hostile reception."

And she coquettishly enhanced the charm of the smile which the idea had brought to her lips, by giving to her blue eyes, which were fixed on the General, a gentle, dreamy expression.

"My dear Princess, you know that they'd be simply wild with joy."

"No, why?" she inquired, with the utmost vivacity, either so as to seem unaware that it would be because she was one of the first ladies in France, or so as to have the pleasure of hearing the General tell her so. "Why? How can you tell? Perhaps they would think it the most unpleasant thing that could possibly happen. I know nothing about them, but if they're anything like me, I find it quite boring enough to see the people I do know; I'm sure if I had to see people I didn't know as well, even if they had 'fought like heroes,' I should go stark mad. Besides, except when it's an old friend like you, whom one knows quite apart from that, I'm not sure that 'heroism' takes one very far in society. It's often quite boring enough to have to give a dinner-party, but if one had to offer one's arm to Spartacus, to let him take one down . . . ! Really, no; it would never be Vercingetorix I should send for, to make a fourteenth. I feel sure, I should keep him for really big 'crushes.' And as I never give any . . ."

"Ah! Princess, it's easy to see you're not a Guermantes for nothing. You have your share of it, all right, the 'wit of the Guermantes'!"

"But people always talk about the wit of *the* Guermantes; I never could make out why. Do you really know any *others* who have it?" she rallied him, with a rippling flow of laughter, her features concentrated, yoked to the service of her animation, her eyes sparkling, blazing with a radiant sunshine of gaiety which could be kindled only by such speeches —even if the Princess had to make them herself—as were in praise of her wit or of her beauty. "Look, there's Swann talking to your Cambremer woman; over there, beside old Saint-Euverte, don't you see him? Ask him to introduce you. But hurry up, he seems to be just going!"

"Did you notice how dreadfully ill he's looking?" asked the General.

"My precious Charles? Ah, he's coming at last; I was beginning to think he didn't want to see me!"

Swann was extremely fond of the Princesse des Laumes, and the sight of her recalled to him Guermantes, a property close to Combray, and all that country which he so dearly loved and had ceased to visit, so as not to be separated from Odette. Slipping into the manner, half-artistic, half-amorous—with which he could always manage to amuse the Princess—a manner which came to him quite naturally whenever he dipped for a moment into the old social atmosphere, and wishing also to express in words, for his own satisfaction, the longing that he felt for the country:

"Ah!" he exclaimed, or rather intoned, in such a way as to be audible at once to Mme. de Saint-Euverte, to whom he spoke, and to Mme. des Laumes, for whom he was speaking, "Behold our charming Princess! See, she has come up on purpose from Guermantes to hear Saint Francis preach to the birds, and has only just had time, like a dear little tit-mouse, to go and pick a few little hips and haws and put them in her hair; there are even some drops of dew upon them still, a little of the hoar-frost which must be making the Duchess, down there, shiver. It is very pretty indeed, my dear Princess."

"What! The Princess came up on purpose from Guermantes? But that's too wonderful! I never knew; I'm quite bewildered," Mme. de Saint-Euverte protested with quaint simplicity, being but little accustomed to Swann's way of speaking. And then, examining the Princess's headdress, "Why, you're quite right; it is copied from . . . what shall I say, not chestnuts, no,—oh, it's a delightful idea, but how can the Princess have known what was going to be on my programme? The musicians didn't tell me, even."

Swann, who was accustomed, when he was with a woman whom he had kept up the habit of addressing in terms of gallantry, to pay her delicate compliments which most other people would not and need not understand, did not condescend to explain to Mme. de Saint-Euverte that he had been speaking metaphorically. As for the Princess, she was in fits of laughter, both because Swann's wit was highly appreciated by her set, and because she could never hear a compliment addressed to herself without finding it exquisitely subtle and irresistibly amusing.

"Indeed! I'm delighted, Charles, if my little hips and haws meet with your approval. But tell me, why did you bow to that Cambremer person, are you also her neighbour in the country?"

Mme. de Saint-Euverte, seeing that the Princess seemed quite happy talking to Swann, had drifted away.

"But you are, yourself, Princess!"

"I! Why, they must have 'countries' everywhere, those creatures! Don't I wish I had!"

"No, not the Cambremers; her own people. She was a Legrandin, and used to come to Combray. I don't know whether you are aware that you are Comtesse de Combray, and that the Chapter owes you a due."

"I don't know what the Chapter owes me, but I do know that I'm 'touched' for a hundred francs, every year, by the Curé, which is a due that I could very well do without. But surely these Cambremers have rather a startling name. It ends just in time, but it ends badly!" she said with a laugh.

"It begins no better." Swann took the point.

"Yes; that double abbreviation!"

"Some one very angry and very proper who didn't dare to finish the first word."

"But since he couldn't stop himself beginning the second, he'd have done better to finish the first and be done with it. We are indulging in the most refined form of humour, my dear Charles, in the very best of taste—but how tiresome it is that I never see you now," she went on in a coaxing tone, "I do so love talking to you. Just imagine, I could not make that idiot Froberville see that there was anything funny about the name Cambremer. Do agree that life is a dreadful business. It's only when I see you that I stop feeling bored."

Which was probably not true. But Swann and the Princess had the same way of looking at the little things of life—the effect, if not the cause of which was a close analogy between their modes of expression and even of pronunciation. This similarity was not striking because no two things could have been more unlike than their voices. But if one took the trouble to imagine Swann's utterances divested of the sonority that enwrapped them, of the moustache from under which they emerged, one found that they were the same phrases, the same inflexions, that they had the 'tone' of the Guermantes set. On important matters, Swann and the Princess had not an idea in common. But since Swann had become so melancholy, and was always in that trembling condition which precedes a flood of tears, he had the same need to speak about his grief that a murderer has to tell some one about his crime. And when he heard the Princess say that life was a dreadful business, he felt as much comforted as if she had spoken to him of Odette.

"Yes, life is a dreadful business! We must meet more often, my dear friend. What is so nice about you is that you are not cheerful. We could spend a most pleasant evening together."

"I'm sure we could; why not come down to Guermantes? My mother-in-law would be wild with joy. It's supposed to be very ugly down there, but I must say, I find the neighborhood not at all unattractive; I have a horror of 'picturesque spots'."

"I know it well, it's delightful!" replied Swann. "It's almost too beautiful, too much alive for me just at present; it's a country to be happy in. It's perhaps because I have lived there, but things there speak to me so. As soon as a breath of wind gets up, and the cornfields begin to stir, I feel that some one is going to appear suddenly, that I am going to hear some news; and those little houses by the water's edge . . . I should be quite wretched!"

"Oh! my dearest Charles, do take care; there's that appalling Rampillon woman; she's seen me; hide me somewhere, do tell me again, quickly, what it was that happened to her; I get so mixed up; she's just married off her daughter, or her lover (I never can remember),—perhaps both—to each other! Oh, no, I remember now, she's been dropped by her Prince . . . Pretend to be talking, so that the poor old Berenice sha'n't come and invite me to dinner. Anyhow, I'm going. Listen, my dearest Charles, now that I have seen you, once in a blue moon, won't you let me carry you off and take you to the Princesse de Parme's, who would be so pleased to see you (you know), and Basin too, for that matter; he's meeting me there. If one didn't get news of you, sometimes, from Mémé . . . Remember, I never see you at all now!"

Swann declined. Having told M. de Charlus that, on leaving Mme. de Saint-Euverte's, he would go straight home, he did not care to run the risk, by going on now to the Princesse de Parme's, of missing a message which he had, all the time, been hoping to see brought in to him by one of the footmen, during the party, and which he was perhaps going to find left with his own porter, at home.

"Poor Swann," said Mme. des Laumes that night to her husband; "he is always charming, but he does look so dreadfully unhappy. You will see for yourself, for he has promised to dine with us one of these days. I do feel that it's really absurd that a man of his intelligence should let himself be made to suffer by a creature of that kind, who isn't even interesting, for they tell me, she's an absolute idiot!" she concluded with the wisdom invariably shewn by people who, not being in love themselves, feel that a clever man ought to be unhappy only about such persons as are worth his while; which is rather like being astonished that anyone should condescend to die of cholera at the bidding of so insignificant a creature as the common bacillus.

Swann now wished to go home, but, just as he was making his escape, General de Froberville caught him and asked for an introduction to Mme. de Cambremer, and he was obliged to go back into the room to look for her.

"I say, Swann, I'd rather be married to that little woman than killed by savages, what do you say?"

The words 'killed by savages' pierced Swann's aching heart; and at once he felt the need of continuing the conversation. "Ah!" he began, "some fine lives have been lost in that way . . . There was, you remember, that explorer whose remains Dumont d'Urville brought back, La Pérouse . . ." (and he was at once happy again, as though he had named Odette). "He was a fine character, and interests me very much, does La Pérouse," he ended sadly.

"Oh, yes, of course, La Pérouse," said the General. "It's quite a well-known name. There's a street called that."

"Do you know anyone in the Rue La Pérouse?" asked Swann excitedly.

"Only Mme. de Chanlivault, the sister of that good fellow Chaussepierre. She gave a most amusing theatre-party the other evening. That's a house that will be really smart some day, you'll see!"

"Oh, so she lives in the Rue La Pérouse. It's attractive; I like that street; it's so sombre."

"Indeed it isn't. You can't have been in it for a long time; it's not at all sombre now; they're beginning to build all round there."

When Swann did finally introduce M. de Froberville to the young Mme. de Cambremer, since it was the first time that she had heard the General's name, she hastily outlined upon her lips the smile of joy and surprise with which she would have greeted him if she had never, in the whole of her life, heard anything else; for, as she did not yet know all the friends of her new family, whenever anyone was presented to her, she assumed that he must be one of them, and thinking that she would shew her tact by appearing to have heard 'such a lot about him' since her marriage, she would hold out her hand with an air of hesitation which was meant as a proof at once of the inculcated reserve which she had to overcome and of the spontaneous friendliness which successfully overcame it. And so her parents-in-law, whom she still regarded as the most eminent pair in France, declared that she was an angel; all the more that they preferred to appear, in marrying her to their son, to have yielded to the attraction rather of her natural charm than of her considerable fortune.

"It's easy to see that you're a musician heart and soul, Madame," said the General, alluding to the incident of the candle.

Meanwhile the concert had begun again, and Swann saw that he could not now go before the end of the new number. He suffered greatly from being shut up among all these people whose stupidity and absurdities wounded him all the more cruelly since, being ignorant of his love, incapable, had they known of it, of taking any interest, or of doing more than smile at it as at some childish joke, or deplore it as an act of insanity, they made it appear to him in the aspect of a subjective state which existed for himself alone, whose reality there was nothing external to confirm; he suffered overwhelmingly, to the point at which even the sound of the instruments made him want to cry, from having to prolong his exile in this place to which Odette would never come, in which no one, nothing was aware of her existence, from which she was entirely absent.

But suddenly it was as though she had entered, and this apparition tore him with such anguish that his hand rose impulsively to his heart. What had happened was that the violin had risen to a series of high notes, on which it rested as though expecting something, an expectancy which it prolonged without ceasing to hold on to the notes, in the exaltation with which it already saw the expected object approaching, and with a desperate effort to continue until its arrival, to welcome it before itself expired, to keep the way open for a moment longer, with all its remaining strength, that the stranger might enter in, as one holds a door open that would otherwise automatically close. And before Swann had had time to understand what was happening, to think: "It is the little phrase from Vinteuil's sonata. I mustn't listen!", all his memories of the days when Odette had been in love with him, which he had succeeded, up till that evening, in keeping invisible in the depths of his being, deceived by this sudden reflection of a season of love, whose sun, they supposed, had dawned again, had awakened from their slumber, had taken wing and risen to sing maddeningly in his ears, without pity for his present desolation, the forgotten strains of happiness.

In place of the abstract expressions "the time when I was happy," "the time when I was loved," which he had often used until then, and without much suffering, for his intelligence had not embodied in them anything of the past save fictitious extracts which preserved none of the reality, he now recovered everything that had fixed unalterably the peculiar, volatile essence of that lost happiness; he could see it all; the snowy, curled petals of the chrysanthemum which she had tossed after him into his carriage, which he had kept pressed to his lips, the address 'Maison Dorée,' embossed on the note-paper on which he had read "My hand trembles so as I write to you," the frowning contraction of her eyebrows when she said pleadingly: "You won't let it be very long before you send for me?"; he could smell the heated iron of the barber whom he used to have in to singe his hair while Loredan went to fetch the little working girl; could feel the torrents of rain which fell so often that spring, the ice-cold homeward drive in his victoria, by moonlight; all the network of mental habits, of seasonable impressions, of sensory reactions, which had extended over a series of weeks its uniform meshes, by which his body now found itself inextricably held. At that time he had been satisfying a sensual curiosity to know what were the pleasures of those people who lived for love alone. He had supposed that he could stop there, that he would not be obliged to learn their sorrows also; how small a thing the actual charm of Odette was now in comparison with that formidable terror which extended it like a cloudy halo all around her, that enormous anguish of not knowing at every hour of the day and night what she had been doing, of not possessing her wholly, at all times and in all places! Alas, he recalled the accents in which she had exclaimed: "But I can see you at any time; I am always free!"—she, who was never free now; the interest, the curiosity that she had shewn in his life, her passionate desire that he should do her the favour—of which it was he who, then, had felt suspicious, as of a possibly tedious waste of his time and disturbance of his arrangements—of granting her access to his study; how she had been obliged to beg that he would let her take him to the Verdurins'; and, when he did allow her to come to him once a month, how she had first, before he would let himself be swayed, had to repeat what a joy it would be to her, that custom of their seeing each other daily, for which she had longed at a time when to him it had seemed only a tiresome distraction, for which, since that time, she had conceived a distaste and had definitely broken herself of it, while it had become for him so insatiable, so dolorous a need. Little had he suspected how truly he spoke when, on their third meeting, as she repeated: "But why don't you let me come to you oftener?" he had told her, laughing, and in a vein of gallantry, that it was for fear of forming a hopeless passion. Now, alas, it still happened at times that she wrote to him from a restaurant or hotel, on paper which bore a printed address, but printed in letters of fire that seared his heart. "Written from the Hôtel Vouillemont. What on earth can she have gone there for? With whom? What happened there?" He remembered the gas-jets that were being extinguished along the Boulevard des Italiens when he had met her, when all hope was gone, among the errant shades upon that night which had seemed to him almost supernatural and which now (that night of a period when he had not even to ask himself whether he would be annoying her by looking for her and by finding her, so certain was he that she knew no greater happiness than to see him and to let him take her home) belonged indeed to a mysterious world to which one never may return again once its doors are closed. And Swann could distinguish, standing, motionless, before that scene of happiness in which it lived again, a wretched figure which filled him with such pity, because he did not at first recognise who it was, that he must lower his head, lest anyone should observe that his eyes were filled with tears. It was himself.

When he had realised this, his pity ceased; he was jealous, now, of that other self whom she had loved, he was jealous of those men of whom he had so often said, without much suffering: "Perhaps she's in love with them," now that he had exchanged the vague idea of loving, in which there is no love, for the petals of the chrysanthemum and the 'letter-heading' of the Maison d'Or; for they were full of love. And then, his anguish becoming too keen, he passed his hand over his forehead, let the monocle drop from his eye, and wiped its glass. And doubtless, if he had caught sight of himself at that moment, he would have added to the collection of the monocles which he had already identified, this one which he removed, like an importunate, worrying thought, from his head, while from its misty surface, with his handkerchief, he sought to obliterate his cares.

There are in the music of the violin—if one does not see the instrument itself, and so cannot relate what one hears to its form, which modifies the fullness of the sound—accents which are so closely akin to those of certain contralto voices, that one has the illusion that a singer has taken her place amid the orchestra. One raises one's eyes; one sees only the wooden case, magical as a Chinese box; but, at moments, one is still tricked by the deceiving appeal of the Siren; at times, too, one believes that one is listening to a captive spirit, struggling in the darkness of its masterful box, a box quivering with enchantment, like a devil immersed in a stoup of holy water; sometimes, again, it is in the air, at large, like a pure and supernatural creature that reveals to the ear, as it passes, its invisible message.

As though the musicians were not nearly so much playing the little phrase as performing the rites on which it insisted before it would consent to appear, as proceeding to utter the incantations necessary to procure, and to prolong for a few moments, the miracle of its apparition, Swann, who was no more able now to see it than if it had belonged to a world of ultra-violet light, who experienced something like the refreshing sense of a metamorphosis in the momentary blindness with which he had been struck as he approached it, Swann felt that it was present, like a protective goddess, a confidant of his love, who, so as to be able to come to him through the crowd, and to draw him aside to speak to him, had disguised herself in this sweeping cloak of sound. And as she passed him, light, soothing, as softly murmured as the perfume of a flower, telling him what she had to say, every word of which he closely scanned, sorry to see them fly away so fast, he made involuntarily with his lips the motion of kissing, as it went by him, the harmonious, fleeting form.

He felt that he was no longer in exile and alone since she, who addressed herself to him, spoke to him in a whisper of Odette. For he had no longer, as of old, the impression that Odette and he were not known to the little phrase. Had it not often been the witness of their joys? True that, as often, it had warned him of their frailty. And indeed, whereas, in that distant time, he had divined an element of suffering in its smile, in its limpid and disillusioned intonation, to-night he found there rather the charm of a resignation that was almost gay. Of those sorrows, of which the little phrase had spoken to him then, which he had seen it—without his being touched by them himself—carry past him, smiling, on its sinuous and rapid course, of those sorrows which were now become his own, without his having any hope of being, ever, delivered from them, it seemed to say to him, as once it had said of his happiness: "What does all that matter; it is all nothing." And Swann's thoughts were borne for the first time on a wave of pity and tenderness towards that Vinteuil, towards that unknown, exalted brother who also must have suffered so greatly; what could his life have been? From the depths of what well of sorrow could he have drawn that god-like strength, that unlimited power of creation?

When it was the little phrase that spoke to him of the vanity of his sufferings, Swann found a sweetness in that very wisdom which, but a little while back, had seemed to him intolerable when he thought that he could read it on the faces of indifferent strangers, who would regard his love as a digression that was without importance. 'Twas because the little phrase, unlike them, whatever opinion it might hold on the short duration of these states of the soul, saw in them something not, as everyone else saw, less serious than the events of everyday life, but, on the contrary, so far superior to everyday life as to be alone worthy of the trouble of expressing it. Those graces of an intimate sorrow, 'twas them that the phrase endeavoured to imitate, to create anew; and even their essence, for all that it consists in being incommunicable and in appearing trivial to everyone save him who has experience of them, the little phrase had captured, had rendered visible. So much so that it made their value be confessed, their divine sweetness be tasted by all those same onlookers—provided only that they were in any sense musical—who, the next moment, would ignore, would disown them in real life, in every individual love that came into being beneath their eyes. Doubtless the form in which it had codified those graces could not be analysed into any logical elements. But ever since, more than a year before, discovering to him many of the riches of his own soul, the love of music had been born, and for a time at least had dwelt in him, Swann had regarded musical *motifs* as actual ideas, of another world, of another order, ideas veiled in shadows, unknown, impenetrable by the human mind, which none the less were perfectly distinct one from another, unequal among themselves in value and in significance. When, after that first evening at the Verdurins', he had had the little phrase played over to him again, and had sought to disentangle from his confused impressions how it was that, like a perfume or a caress, it swept over and enveloped him, he had observed that it was to the closeness of the intervals between the five notes which composed it and to the constant repetition of two of them that was due that impression of a frigid, a contracted sweetness; but in reality he knew that he was basing this conclusion not upon the phrase itself, but merely upon certain equivalents, substituted (for his mind's convenience) for the mysterious entity of which he had become aware, before ever he knew the Verdurins, at that earlier party, when for the first time he had heard the sonata played. He knew that his memory of the piano falsified still further the perspective in which he saw the music, that the field open to the musician is not a miserable stave of seven notes, but an immeasurable keyboard (still, almost all of it, unknown), on which, here and there only, separated by the gross darkness of its unexplored tracts, some few among the millions of keys, keys of tenderness, of passion, of courage, of serenity, which compose it, each one differing from all the rest as one universe differs from another, have been discovered by certain great artists who do us the service, when they awaken in us the emotion corresponding to the theme which they have found, of shewing us what richness, what variety lies hidden, unknown to us, in that great black impenetrable night, discouraging exploration, of our soul, which we have been content to regard as valueless and waste and void. Vinteuil had been one of those musicians. In his little phrase, albeit it presented to the mind's eye a clouded surface, there was contained, one felt, a matter so consistent, so explicit, to which the phrase gave so new, so original a force, that those who had once heard it preserved the memory of it in the treasure-chamber of their minds. Swann would repair to it as to a conception of love and happiness, of which at once he knew as well in what respects it was peculiar as he would know of the *Princesse de Clèves,* or of *René,* should either of those titles occur to him. Even when he was not thinking of the little phrase, it existed, latent, in his mind, in the same way as certain other conceptions without material equivalent, such as our notions of light, of sound, of perspective, of bodily desire, the rich possessions wherewith our inner temple is diversified and adorned. Perhaps we shall lose them, perhaps they will be obliterated, if we return to nothing in the dust. But so long as we are alive, we can no more bring ourselves to a state in which we shall not have known them than we can with regard to any material object, than we can, for example, doubt the luminosity of a lamp that has just been lighted, in view of the changed aspect of everything in the room, from which has vanished even the memory of the darkness. In that way Vinteuil's phrase, like some theme, say, in *Tristan,* which represents to us also a certain acquisition of sentiment, has espoused our mortal state, had endued a vesture of humanity that was affecting enough. Its destiny was linked, for the future, with that of the human soul, of which it was one of the special, the most distinctive ornaments. Perhaps it is not-being that is the true state, and all our dream of life is without existence; but, if so, we feel that it must be that these phrases of music, these conceptions which exist in relation to our dream, are nothing either. We shall perish, but we have for our hostages these divine captives who shall follow and share our fate. And death in their company is something less bitter, less inglorious, perhaps even less certain.

So Swann was not mistaken in believing that the phrase of the sonata did, really, exist. Human as it was from this point of view, it belonged, none the less, to an order of supernatural creatures whom we have never seen, but whom, in spite of that, we recognise and acclaim with rapture when some explorer of the unseen contrives to coax one forth, to bring it down from that divine world to which he has access to shine for a brief moment in the firmament of ours. This was what Vinteuil had done for the little phrase. Swann felt that the composer had been content (with the musical instruments at his disposal) to draw aside its veil, to make it visible, following and respecting its outlines with a hand so loving, so prudent, so delicate and so sure, that the sound altered at every moment, blunting itself to indicate a shadow, springing back into life when it must follow the curve of some more bold projection. And one proof that Swann was not mistaken when he believed in the real existence of this phrase, was that anyone with an ear at all delicate for music would at once have detected the imposture had Vinteuil, endowed with less power to see and to render its forms, sought to dissemble (by adding a line, here and there, of his own invention) the dimness of his vision or the feebleness of his hand.

The phrase had disappeared. Swann knew that it would come again at the end of the last movement, after a long passage which Mme. Verdurin's pianist always 'skipped.' There were in this passage some admirable ideas which Swann had not distinguished on first hearing the sonata, and which he now perceived, as if they had, in the cloakroom of his memory, divested themselves of their uniform disguise of novelty. Swann listened to all the scattered themes which entered into the composition of the phrase, as its premises enter into the inevitable conclusion of a syllogism; he was assisting at the mystery of its birth. "Audacity," he exclaimed to himself, "as inspired, perhaps, as a Lavoisier's or an Ampère's, the audacity of a Vinteuil making experiment, discovering the secret laws that govern an unknown force, driving across a region unexplored towards the one possible goal the invisible team in which he has placed his trust and which he never may discern!" How charming the dialogue which Swann now heard between piano and violin, at the beginning of the last passage. The suppression of human speech, so far from letting fancy reign there uncontrolled (as one might have thought), had eliminated it altogether. Never was spoken language of such inflexible necessity, never had it known questions so pertinent, such obvious replies. At first the piano complained alone, like a bird deserted by its mate; the violin heard and answered it, as from a neighbouring tree. It was as at the first beginning of the world, as if there were not yet but these twain upon the earth, or rather in this world closed against all the rest, so fashioned by the logic of its creator that in it there should never be any but themselves; the world of this sonata. Was it a bird, was it the soul, not yet made perfect, of the little phrase, was it a fairy, invisibly somewhere lamenting, whose plaint the piano heard and tenderly repeated? Its cries were so sudden that the violinist must snatch up his bow and race to catch them as they came. Marvellous bird! The violinist seemed to wish to charm, to tame, to woo, to win it. Already it had passed into his soul, already the little phrase which it evoked shook like a medium's the body of the violinist, 'possessed' indeed. Swann knew that the phrase was going to speak to him once again. And his personality was now so divided that the strain of waiting for the imminent moment when he would find himself face to face, once more, with the phrase, convulsed him in one of those sobs which a fine line of poetry or a piece of alarming news will wring from us, not when we are alone, but when we repeat one or the other to a friend, in whom we see ourselves reflected, like a third person, whose probable emotion softens him. It reappeared, but this time to remain poised in the air, and to sport there for a moment only, as though immobile, and shortly to expire. And so Swann lost nothing of the precious time for which it lingered. It was still there, like an iridescent bubble that floats for a while unbroken. As a rainbow, when its brightness fades, seems to subside, then soars again and, before it is extinguished, is glorified with greater splendour than it has ever shewn; so to the two colours which the phrase had hitherto allowed to appear it added others now, chords shot with every hue in the prism, and made them sing. Swann dared not move, and would have liked to compel all the other people in the room to remain still also, as if the slightest movement might embarrass the magic presence, supernatural, delicious, frail, that would so easily vanish. But no one, as it happened, dreamed of speaking. The ineffable utterance of one solitary man, absent, perhaps dead (Swann did not know whether Vinteuil were still alive), breathed out above the rites of those two hierophants, sufficed to arrest the attention of three hundred minds, and made of that stage on which a soul was thus called into being one of the noblest altars on which a supernatural ceremony could be performed. It followed that, when the phrase at last was finished, and only its fragmentary echoes floated among the subsequent themes which had already taken its place, if Swann at first was annoyed to see the Comtesse de Monteriender, famed for her imbecilities, lean over towards him to confide in him her impressions, before even the sonata had come to an end; he could not refrain from smiling, and perhaps also found an underlying sense, which she was incapable of perceiving, in the words that she used. Dazzled by the virtuosity of the performers, the Comtesse exclaimed to Swann: "It's astonishing! I have never seen anything to beat it . . ." But a scrupulous regard for accuracy making her correct her first assertion, she added the reservation: "anything to beat it . . . since the table-turning!"

From that evening, Swann understood that the feeling which Odette had once had for him would never revive, that his hopes of happiness would not be realised now. And the days on which, by a lucky chance, she had once more shewn herself kind and loving to him, or if she had paid him any attention, he recorded those apparent and misleading signs of a slight movement on her part towards him with the same tender and sceptical solicitude, the desperate joy that people reveal who, when they are nursing a friend in the last days of an incurable malady, relate, as significant facts of infinite value: "Yesterday he went through his accounts himself, and actually corrected a mistake that we had made in adding them up; he ate an egg to-day and seemed quite to enjoy it, if he digests it properly we shall try him with a cutlet to-morrow,"—although they themselves know that these things are meaningless on the eve of an inevitable death. No doubt Swann was assured that if he had now been living at a distance from Odette he would gradually have lost all interest in her, so that he would have been glad to learn that she was leaving Paris for ever; he would have had the courage to remain there; but he had not the courage to go.

He had often thought of going. Now that he was once again at work upon his essay on Vermeer, he wanted to return, for a few days at least, to The Hague, to Dresden, to Brunswick. He was certain that a 'Toilet of Diana' which had been acquired by the Mauritshuis at the Goldschmidt sale as a Nicholas Maes was in reality a Vermeer. And he would have liked to be able to examine the picture on the spot, so as to strengthen his conviction. But to leave Paris while Odette was there, and even when she was not there—for in strange places where our sensations have not been numbed by habit, we refresh, we revive an old pain—was for him so cruel a project that he felt himself to be capable of entertaining it incessantly in his mind only because he knew himself to be resolute in his determination never to put it into effect. But it would happen that, while he was asleep, the intention to travel would reawaken in him (without his remembering that this particular tour was impossible) and would be realised. One night he dreamed that he was going away for a year; leaning from the window of the train towards a young man on the platform who wept as he bade him farewell, he was seeking to persuade this young man to come away also. The train began to move; he awoke in alarm, and remembered that he was not going away, that he would see Odette that evening, and next day and almost every day. And then, being still deeply moved by his dream, he would thank heaven for those special circumstances which made him independent, thanks to which he could remain in Odette's vicinity, and could even succeed in making her allow him to see her sometimes; and, counting over the list of his advantages: his social position—his fortune, from which she stood too often in need of assistance not to shrink from the prospect of a definite rupture (having even, so people said, an ulterior plan of getting him to marry her)—his friendship with M. de Charlus, which, it must be confessed, had never won him any very great favour from Odette, but which gave him the pleasant feeling that she was always hearing complimentary things said about him by this common friend for whom she had so great an esteem—and even his own intelligence, the whole of which he employed in weaving, every day, a fresh plot which would make his presence, if not agreeable, at any rate necessary to Odette—he thought of what might have happened to him if all these advantages had been lacking, he thought that, if he had been, like so many other men, poor and humble, without resources, forced to undertake any task that might be offered to him, or tied down by parents or by a wife, he might have been obliged to part from Odette, that that dream, the terror of which was still so recent, might well have been true; and he said to himself: "People don't know when they are happy. They're never so unhappy as they think they are." But he reflected that this existence had lasted already for several years, that all that he could now hope for was that it should last for ever, that he would sacrifice his work, his pleasures, his friends, in fact the whole of his life to the daily expectation of a meeting which, when it occurred, would bring him no happiness; and he asked himself whether he was not mistaken, whether the circumstances that had favoured their relations and had prevented a final rupture had not done a disservice to his career, whether the outcome to be desired was not that as to which he rejoiced that it happened only in dreams—his own departure; and he said to himself that people did not know when they were unhappy, that they were never so happy as they supposed.

Sometimes he hoped that she would die, painlessly, in some accident, she who was out of doors in the streets, crossing busy thoroughfares, from morning to night. And as she always returned safe and sound, he marvelled at the strength, at the suppleness of the human body, which was able continually to hold in check, to outwit all the perils that environed it (which to Swann seemed innumerable, since his own secret desire had strewn them in her path), and so allowed its occupant, the soul, to abandon itself, day after day, and almost with impunity, to its career of mendacity, to the pursuit of pleasure. And Swann felt a very cordial sympathy with that Mahomet II whose portrait by Bellini he admired, who, on finding that he had fallen madly in love with one of his wives, stabbed her, in order, as his Venetian biographer artlessly relates, to recover his spiritual freedom. Then he would be ashamed of thinking thus only of himself, and his own sufferings would seem to deserve no pity now that he himself was disposing so cheaply of Odette's very life.

Since he was unable to separate himself from her without a subsequent return, if at least he had seen her continuously and without separations his grief would ultimately have been assuaged, and his love would, perhaps, have died. And from the moment when she did not wish to leave Paris for ever he had hoped that she would never go. As he knew that her one prolonged absence, every year, was in August and September, he had abundant opportunity, several months in advance, to dissociate from it the grim picture of her absence throughout Eternity which was lodged in him by anticipation, and which, consisting of days closely akin to the days through which he was then passing, floated in a cold transparency in his mind, which it saddened and depressed, though without causing him any intolerable pain. But that conception of the future, that flowing stream, colourless and unconfined, a single word from Odette sufficed to penetrate through all Swann's defences, and like a block of ice immobilised it, congealed its fluidity, made it freeze altogether; and Swann felt himself suddenly filled with an enormous and unbreakable mass which pressed on the inner walls of his consciousness until he was fain to burst asunder; for Odette had said casually, watching him with a malicious smile: "Forcheville is going for a fine trip at Whitsuntide. He's going to Egypt!" and Swann had at once understood that this meant: "I am going to Egypt at Whitsuntide with Forcheville." And, in fact, if, a few days later, Swann began: "About that trip that you told me you were going to take with Forcheville," she would answer carelessly: "Yes, my dear boy, we're starting on the 19th; we'll send you a 'view' of the Pyramids." Then he was determined to know whether she was Forcheville's mistress, to ask her point-blank, to insist upon her telling him. He knew that there were some perjuries which, being so superstitious, she would not commit, and besides, the fear, which had hitherto restrained his curiosity, of making Odette angry if he questioned her, of making himself odious, had ceased to exist now that he had lost all hope of ever being loved by her.

One day he received an anonymous letter which told him that Odette had been the mistress of countless men (several of whom it named, among them Forcheville, M. de Bréauté and the painter) and women, and that she frequented houses of ill-fame. He was tormented by the discovery that there was to be numbered among his friends a creature capable of sending him such a letter (for certain details betrayed in the writer a familiarity with his private life). He wondered who it could be. But he had never had any suspicion with regard to the unknown actions of other people, those which had no visible connection with what they said. And when he wanted to know whether it was rather beneath the apparent character of M. de Charlus, or of M. des Laumes, or of M. d'Orsan that he must place the untravelled region in which this ignoble action might have had its birth; as none of these men had ever, in conversation with Swann, suggested that he approved of anonymous letters, and as everything that they had ever said to him implied that they strongly disapproved, he saw no further reason for associating this infamy with the character of any one of them more than with the rest. M. de Charlus was somewhat inclined to eccentricity, but he was fundamentally good and kind; M. des Laumes was a trifle dry, but wholesome and straight. As for M. d'Orsan, Swann had never met anyone who, even in the most depressing circumstances, would come to him with a more heartfelt utterance, would act more properly or with more discretion. So much so that he was unable to understand the rather indelicate part commonly attributed to M. d'Orsan in his relations with a certain wealthy woman, and that whenever he thought of him he was obliged to set that evil reputation on one side, as irreconcilable with so many unmistakable proofs of his genuine sincerity and refinement. For a moment Swann felt that his mind was becoming clouded, and he thought of something else so as to recover a little light; until he had the courage to return to those other reflections. But then, after not having been able to suspect anyone, he was forced to suspect everyone that he knew. After all, M. de Charlus might be most fond of him, might be most good-natured; but he was a neuropath; to-morrow, perhaps, he would burst into tears on hearing that Swann was ill; and to-day, from jealousy, or in anger, or carried away by some sudden idea, he might have wished to do him a deliberate injury. Really, that kind of man was the worst of all. The Prince des Laumes was, certainly, far less devoted to Swann than was M. de Charlus. But for that very reason he had not the same susceptibility with regard to him; and besides, his was a nature which, though, no doubt, it was cold, was as incapable of a base as of a magnanimous action. Swann regretted that he had formed no attachments in his life except to such people. Then he reflected that what prevents men from doing harm to their neighbours is fellow-feeling, that he could not, in the last resort, answer for any but men whose natures were analogous to his own, as was, so far as the heart went, that of M. de Charlus. The mere thought of causing Swann so much distress would have been revolting to him. But with a man who was insensible, of another order of humanity, as was the Prince des Laumes, how was one to foresee the actions to which he might be led by the promptings of a different nature? To have a good heart was everything, and M. de Charlus had one. But M. d'Orsan was not lacking in that either, and his relations with Swann—cordial, but scarcely intimate, arising from the pleasure which, as they held the same views about everything, they found in talking together—were more quiescent than the enthusiastic affection of M. de Charlus, who was apt to be led into passionate activity, good or evil. If there was anyone by whom Swann felt that he had always been understood, and (with delicacy) loved, it was M. d'Orsan. Yes, but the life he led; it could hardly be called honourable. Swann regretted that he had never taken any notice of those rumours, that he himself had admitted, jestingly, that he had never felt so keen a sense of sympathy, or of respect, as when he was in thoroughly 'detrimental' society. "It is not for nothing," he now assured himself, "that when people pass judgment upon their neighbour, their finding is based upon his actions. It is those alone that are significant, and not at all what we say or what we think. Charlus and des Laumes may have this or that fault, but they are men of honour. Orsan, perhaps, has not the same faults, but he is not a man of honour. He may have acted dishonourably once again." Then he suspected Rémi, who, it was true, could only have inspired the letter, but he now felt himself, for a moment, to be on the right track. To begin with, Loredan had his own reasons for wishing harm to Odette. And then, how were we not to suppose that our servants, living in a situation inferior to our own, adding to our fortunes and to our frailties imaginary riches and vices for which they at once envied and despised us, should not find themselves led by fate to act in a manner abhorrent to people of our own class? He also suspected my grandfather. On every occasion when Swann had asked him to do him any service, had he not invariably declined? Besides, with his ideas of middle-class respectability, he might have thought that he was acting for Swann's good. He suspected, in turn, Bergotte, the painter, the Verdurins; paused for a moment to admire once again the wisdom of people in society, who refused to mix in the artistic circles in which such things were possible, were, perhaps, even openly avowed, as excellent jokes; but then he recalled the marks of honesty that were to be observed in those Bohemians, and contrasted them with the life of expedients, often bordering on fraudulence, to which the want of money, the craving for luxury, the corrupting influence of their pleasures often drove members of the aristocracy. In a word, this anonymous letter proved that he himself knew a human being capable of the most infamous conduct, but he could see no reason why that infamy should lurk in the depths—which no strange eye might explore—of the warm heart rather than the cold, the artist's rather than the business-man's, the noble's rather than the flunkey's. What criterion ought one to adopt, in order to judge one's fellows? After all, there was not a single one of the people whom he knew who might not, in certain circumstances, prove capable of a shameful action. Must he then cease to see them all? His mind grew clouded; he passed his hands two or three times across his brow, wiped his glasses with his handkerchief, and remembering that, after all, men who were as good as himself frequented the society of M. de Charlus, the Prince des Laumes and the rest, he persuaded himself that this meant, if not that they were incapable of shameful actions, at least that it was a necessity in human life, to which everyone must submit, to frequent the society of people who were, perhaps, not incapable of such actions. And he continued to shake hands with all the friends whom he had suspected, with the purely formal reservation that each one of them had, possibly, been seeking to drive him to despair. As for the actual contents of the letter, they did not disturb him; for in not one of the charges which it formulated against Odette could he see the least vestige of fact. Like many other men, Swann had a naturally lazy mind, and was slow in invention. He knew quite well as a general truth, that human life is full of contrasts, but in the case of any one human being he imagined all that part of his or her life with which he was not familiar as being identical with the part with which he was. He imagined what was kept secret from him in the light of what was revealed. At such times as he spent with Odette, if their conversation turned upon an indelicate act committed, or an indelicate sentiment expressed by some third person, she would ruthlessly condemn the culprit by virtue of the same moral principles which Swann had always heard expressed by his own parents, and to which he himself had remained loyal; and then, she would arrange her flowers, would sip her tea, would shew an interest in his work. So Swann extended those habits to fill the rest of her life, he reconstructed those actions when he wished to form a picture of the moments in which he and she were apart. If anyone had portrayed her to him as she was, or rather as she had been for so long with himself, but had substituted some other man, he would have been distressed, for such a portrait would have struck him as lifelike. But to suppose that she went to bad houses, that she abandoned herself to orgies with other women, that she led the crapulous existence of the most abject, the most contemptible of mortals—would be an insane wandering of the mind, for the realisation of which, thank heaven, the chrysanthemums that he could imagine, the daily cups of tea, the virtuous indignation left neither time nor place. Only, now and again, he gave Odette to understand that people maliciously kept him informed of everything that she did; and making opportune use of some detail—insignificant but true—which he had accidentally learned, as though it were the sole fragment which he would allow, in spite of himself, to pass his lips, out of the numberless other fragments of that complete reconstruction of her daily life which he carried secretly in his mind, he led her to suppose that he was perfectly informed upon matters, which, in reality, he neither knew nor suspected, for if he often adjured Odette never to swerve from or make alteration of the truth, that was only, whether he realised it or no, in order that Odette should tell him everything that she did. No doubt, as he used to assure Odette, he loved sincerity, but only as he might love a pander who could keep him in touch with the daily life of his mistress. Moreover, his love of sincerity, not being disinterested, had not improved his character. The truth which he cherished was that which Odette would tell him; but he himself, in order to extract that truth from her, was not afraid to have recourse to falsehood, that very falsehood which he never ceased to depict to Odette as leading every human creature down to utter degradation. In a word, he lied as much as did Odette, because, while more unhappy than she, he was no less egotistical. And she, when she heard him repeating thus to her the things that she had done, would stare at him with a look of distrust and, at all hazards, of indignation, so as not to appear to be humiliated, and to be blushing for her actions. One day, after the longest period of calm through which he had yet been able to exist without being overtaken by an attack of jealousy, he had accepted an invitation to spend the evening at the theatre with the Princesse des Laumes. Having opened his newspaper to find out what was being played, the sight of the title—*Les Filles de Marbre,* by Théodore Barrière,—struck him so cruel a blow that he recoiled instinctively from it and turned his head away. Illuminated, as though by a row of footlights, in the new surroundings in which it now appeared, that word 'marble,' which he had lost the power to distinguish, so often had it passed, in print, beneath his eyes, had suddenly become visible once again, and had at once brought back to his mind the story which Odette had told him, long ago, of a visit which she had paid to the Salon at the Palais d'Industrie with Mme. Verdurin, who had said to her, "Take care, now! I know how to melt you, all right. You're not made of marble." Odette had assured him that it was only a joke, and he had not attached any importance to it at the time. But he had had more confidence in her then than he had now. And the anonymous letter referred explicitly to relations of that sort. Without daring to lift his eyes to the newspaper, he opened it, turned the page so as not to see again the words, *Filles de Marbre,* and began to read mechanically the news from the provinces. There had been a storm in the Channel, and damage was reported from Dieppe, Cabourg, Beuzeval. . . . Suddenly he recoiled again in horror.

The name of Beuzeval had suggested to him that of another place in the same district, Beuzeville, which carried also, bound to it by a hyphen, a second name, to wit Bréauté, which he had often seen on maps, but without ever previously remarking that it was the same name as that borne by his friend M. de Bréauté, whom the anonymous letter accused of having been Odette's lover. After all, when it came to M. de Bréauté, there was nothing improbable in the charge; but so far as Mme. Verdurin was concerned, it was a sheer impossibility. From the fact that Odette did occasionally tell a lie, it was not fair to conclude that she never, by any chance, told the truth, and in these bantering conversations with Mme. Verdurin which she herself had repeated to Swann, he could recognize those meaningless and dangerous pleasantries which, in their inexperience of life and ignorance of vice, women often utter (thereby certifying their own innocence), who—as, for instance, Odette,—would be the last people in the world to feel any undue affection for one another. Whereas, on the other hand, the indignation with which she had scattered the suspicions which she had unintentionally brought into being, for a moment, in his mind by her story, fitted in with everything that he knew of the tastes, the temperament of his mistress. But at that moment, by an inspiration of jealousy, analogous to the inspiration which reveals to a poet or a philosopher, who has nothing, so far, but an odd pair of rhymes or a detached observation, the idea or the natural law which will give power, mastery to his work, Swann recalled for the first time a remark which Odette had made to him, at least two years before: "Oh, Mme. Verdurin, she won't hear of anything just now but me. I'm a 'love,' if you please, and she kisses me, and wants me to go with her everywhere, and call her by her Christian name." So far from seeing in these expressions any connection with the absurd insinuations, intended to create an atmosphere of vice, which Odette had since repeated to him, he had welcomed them as a proof of Mme. Verdurin's warm-hearted and generous friendship. But now this old memory of her affection for Odette had coalesced suddenly with his more recent memory of her unseemly conversation. He could no longer separate them in his mind, and he saw them blended in reality, the affection imparting a certain seriousness and importance to the pleasantries which, in return, spoiled the affection of its innocence. He went to see Odette. He sat down, keeping at a distance from her. He did not dare to embrace her, not knowing whether in her, in himself, it would be affection or anger that a kiss would provoke. He sat there silent, watching their love expire. Suddenly he made up his mind.

"Odette, my darling," he began, "I know, I am being simply odious, but I must ask you a few questions. You remember what I once thought about you and Mme. Verdurin? Tell me, was it true? Have you, with her or anyone else, ever?"

She shook her head, pursing her lips together; a sign which people commonly employ to signify that they are not going, because it would bore them to go, when some one has asked, "Are you coming to watch the procession go by?", or "Will you be at the review?". But this shake of the head, which is thus commonly used to decline participation in an event that has yet to come, imparts for that reason an element of uncertainty to the denial of participation in an event that is past. Furthermore, it suggests reasons of personal convenience, rather than any definite repudiation, any moral impossibility. When he saw Odette thus make him a sign that the insinuation was false, he realised that it was quite possibly true.

"I have told you, I never did; you know quite well," she added, seeming angry and uncomfortable.

"Yes, I know all that; but are you quite sure? Don't say to me, 'You know quite well'; say, 'I have never done anything of that sort with any woman.' "

She repeated his words like a lesson learned by rote, and as though she hoped, thereby, to be rid of him: "I have never done anything of that sort with any woman."

"Can you swear it to me on your Laghetto medal?"

Swann knew that Odette would never perjure herself on that.

"Oh, you do make me so miserable," she cried, with a jerk of her body as though to shake herself free of the constraint of his question. "Have you nearly done? What is the matter with you to-day? You seem to have made up your mind that I am to be forced to hate you, to curse you! Look, I was anxious to be friends with you again, for us to have a nice time together, like the old days; and this is all the thanks I get!"

However, he would not let her go, but sat there like a surgeon who waits for a spasm to subside that has interrupted his operation but need not make him abandon it.

"You are quite wrong in supposing that I bear you the least ill-will in the world, Odette," he began with a persuasive and deceitful gentleness. "I never speak to you except of what I already know, and I always know a great deal more than I say. But you alone can mollify by your confession what makes me hate you so long as it has been reported to me only by other people. My anger with you is never due to your actions—I can and do forgive you everything because I love you—but to your untruthfulness, the ridiculous untruthfulness which makes you persist in denying things which I know to be true. How can you expect that I shall continue to love you, when I see you maintain, when I hear you swear to me a thing which I know to be false? Odette, do not prolong this moment which is torturing us both. If you are willing to end it at once, you shall be free of it for ever. Tell me, upon your medal, yes or no, whether you have ever done those things."

"How on earth can I tell?" she was furious. "Perhaps I have, ever so long ago, when I didn't know what I was doing, perhaps two or three times."

Swann had prepared himself for all possibilities. Reality must, therefore, be something which bears no relation to possibilities, any more than the stab of a knife in one's body bears to the gradual movement of the clouds overhead, since those words "two or three times" carved, as it were, a cross upon the living tissues of his heart. A strange thing, indeed, that those words, "two or three times," nothing more than a few words, words uttered in the air, at a distance, could so lacerate a man's heart, as if they had actually pierced it, could sicken a man, like a poison that he had drunk. Instinctively Swann thought of the remark that he had heard at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's: "I have never seen anything to beat it since the table-turning." The agony that he now suffered in no way resembled what he had supposed. Not only because, in the hours when he most entirely mistrusted her, he had rarely imagined such a culmination of evil, but because, even when he did imagine that offence, it remained vague, uncertain, was not clothed in the particular horror which had escaped with the words "perhaps two or three times," was not armed with that specific cruelty, as different from anything that he had known as a new malady by which one is attacked for the first time. And yet this Odette, from whom all this evil sprang, was no less dear to him, was, on the contrary, more precious, as if, in proportion as his sufferings increased, there increased at the same time the price of the sedative, of the antidote which this woman alone possessed. He wished to pay her more attention, as one attends to a disease which one discovers, suddenly, to have grown more serious. He wished that the horrible thing which, she had told him, she had done "two or three times" might be prevented from occurring again. To ensure that, he must watch over Odette. People often say that, by pointing out to a man the faults of his mistress, you succeed only in strengthening his attachment to her, because he does not believe you; yet how much more so if he does! But, Swann asked himself, how could he manage to protect her? He might perhaps be able to preserve her from the contamination of any one woman, but there were hundreds of other women; and he realised how insane had been his ambition when he had begun (on the evening when he had failed to find Odette at the Verdurins') to desire the possession—as if that were ever possible—of another person. Happily for Swann, beneath the mass of suffering which had invaded his soul like a conquering horde of barbarians, there lay a natural foundation, older, more placid, and silently laborious, like the cells of an injured organ which at once set to work to repair the damaged tissues, or the muscles of a paralysed limb which tend to recover their former movements. These older, these autochthonous in-dwellers in his soul absorbed all Swann's strength, for a while, in that obscure task of reparation which gives one an illusory sense of repose during convalescence, or after an operation. This time it was not so much—as it ordinarily was—in Swann's brain that the slackening of tension due to exhaustion took effect, it was rather in his heart. But all the things in life that have once existed tend to recur, and, like a dying animal that is once more stirred by the throes of a convulsion which was, apparently, ended, upon Swann's heart, spared for a moment only, the same agony returned of its own accord to trace the same cross again. He remembered those moonlit evenings, when, leaning back in the victoria that was taking him to the Rue La Pérouse, he would cultivate with voluptuous enjoyment the emotions of a man in love, ignorant of the poisoned fruit that such emotions must inevitably bear. But all those thoughts lasted for no more than a second, the time that it took him to raise his hand to his heart, to draw breath again and to contrive to smile, so as to dissemble his torment. Already he had begun to put further questions. For his jealousy, which had taken an amount of trouble, such as no enemy would have incurred, to strike him this mortal blow, to make him forcibly acquainted with the most cruel pain that he had ever known, his jealousy was not satisfied that he had yet suffered enough, and sought to expose his bosom to an even deeper wound. Like an evil deity, his jealousy was inspiring Swann, was thrusting him on towards destruction. It was not his fault, but Odette's alone, if at first his punishment was not more severe.

"My darling," he began again, "it's all over now; was it with anyone I know?"

"No, I swear it wasn't; besides, I think I exaggerated, I never really went as far as that."

He smiled, and resumed with: "Just as you like. It doesn't really matter, but it's unfortunate that you can't give me any name. If I were able to form an idea of the person that would prevent my ever thinking of her again. I say it for your own sake, because then I shouldn't bother you any more about it. It's so soothing to be able to form a clear picture of things in one's mind. What is really terrible is what one cannot imagine. But you've been so sweet to me; I don't want to tire you. I do thank you, with all my heart, for all the good that you have done me. I've quite finished now. Only one word more: how many times?"

"Oh, Charles! can't you see, you're killing me? It's all ever so long ago. I've never given it a thought. Anyone would say that you were positively trying to put those ideas into my head again. And then you'd be a lot better off!" she concluded, with unconscious stupidity but with intentional malice.

"I only wished to know whether it had been since I knew you. It's only natural. Did it happen here, ever? You can't give me any particular evening, so that I can remind myself what I was doing at the time? You understand, surely, that it's not possible that you don't remember with whom, Odette, my love."

"But I don't know; really, I don't. I think it was in the Bois, one evening when you came to meet us on the Island. You had been dining with the Princesse des Laumes," she added, happy to be able to furnish him with an exact detail, which testified to her veracity. "At the next table there was a woman whom I hadn't seen for ever so long. She said to me, 'Come along round behind the rock, there, and look at the moonlight on the water!' At first I just yawned, and said, 'No, I'm too tired, and I'm quite happy where I am, thank you.' She swore there'd never been anything like it in the way of moonlight. 'I've heard that tale before,' I said to her; you see, I knew quite well what she was after." Odette narrated this episode almost as if it were a joke, either because it appeared to her to be quite natural, or because she thought that she was thereby minimising its importance, or else so as not to appear ashamed. But, catching sight of Swann's face, she changed her tone, and:

"You are a fiend!" she flung at him, "you enjoy tormenting me, making me tell you lies, just so that you'll leave me in peace."

This second blow struck at Swann was even more excruciating than the first. Never had he supposed it to have been so recent an affair, hidden from his eyes that had been too innocent to discern it, not in a past which he had never known, but in evenings which he so well remembered, which he had lived through with Odette, of which he had supposed himself to have such an intimate, such an exhaustive knowledge, and which now assumed, retrospectively, an aspect of cunning and deceit and cruelty. In the midst of them parted, suddenly, a gaping chasm, that moment on the Island in the Bois de Boulogne. Without being intelligent, Odette had the charm of being natural. She had recounted, she had acted the little scene with so much simplicity that Swann, as he gasped for breath, could vividly see it: Odette yawning, the "rock there," . . . He could hear her answer—alas, how lightheartedly—"I've heard that tale before!" He felt that she would tell him nothing more that evening, that no further revelation was to be expected for the present. He was silent for a time, then said to her:

"My poor darling, you must forgive me; I know, I am hurting you dreadfully, but it's all over now; I shall never think of it again."

But she saw that his eyes remained fixed upon the things that he did not know, and on that past era of their love, monotonous and soothing in his memory because it was vague, and now rent, as with a sword-wound, by the news of that minute on the Island in the Bois, by moonlight, while he was dining with the Princesse des Laumes. But he had so far acquired the habit of finding life interesting—of marvelling at the strange discoveries that there were to be made in it—that even while he was suffering so acutely that he did not believe it possible to endure such agony for any length of time, he was saying to himself: "Life is indeed astonishing, and holds some fine surprises; it appears that vice is far more common than one has been led to believe. Here is a woman in whom I had absolute confidence, who looks so simple, so honest, who, in any case, even allowing that her morals are not strict, seemed quite normal and healthy in her tastes and inclinations. I receive a most improbable accusation, I question her, and the little that she admits reveals far more than I could ever have suspected." But he could not confine himself to these detached observations. He sought to form an exact estimate of the importance of what she had just told him, so as to know whether he might conclude that she had done these things often, and was likely to do them again. He repeated her words to himself: "I knew quite well what she was after." "Two or three times." "I've heard that tale before." But they did not reappear in his memory unarmed; each of them held a knife with which it stabbed him afresh. For a long time, like a sick man who cannot restrain himself from attempting, every minute, to make the movement that, he knows, will hurt him, he kept on murmuring to himself: "I'm quite happy where I am, thank you," "I've heard that tale before," but the pain was so intense that he was obliged to stop. He was amazed to find that actions which he had always, hitherto, judged so lightly, had dismissed, indeed, with a laugh, should have become as serious to him as a disease which might easily prove fatal. He knew any number of women whom he could ask to keep an eye on Odette, but how was he to expect them to adjust themselves to his new point of view, and not to remain at that which for so long had been his own, which had always guided him in his voluptuous existence; not to say to him with a smile: "You jealous monster, wanting to rob other people of their pleasure!" By what trap-door, suddenly lowered, had he (who had never found, in the old days, in his love for Odette, any but the most refined of pleasures) been precipitated into this new circle of hell from which he could not see how he was ever to escape. Poor Odette! He wished her no harm. She was but half to blame. Had he not been told that it was her own mother who had sold her, when she was still little more than a child, at Nice, to a wealthy Englishman? But what an agonising truth was now contained for him in those lines of Alfred de Vigny's *Journal d'un Poète* which he had previously read without emotion: "When one feels oneself smitten by love for a woman, one ought to say to oneself, 'What are her surroundings? What has been her life?' All one's future happiness lies in the answer." Swann was astonished that such simple phrases, spelt over in his mind as, "I've heard that tale before," or "I knew quite well what she was after," could cause him so much pain. But he realised that what he had mistaken for simple phrases were indeed parts of the panoply which held and could inflict on him the anguish that he had felt while Odette was telling her story. For it was the same anguish that he now was feeling afresh. It was no good, his knowing now,—indeed, it was no good, as time went on, his having partly forgotten and altogether forgiven the offence—whenever he repeated her words his old anguish refashioned him as he had been before Odette began to speak: ignorant, trustful; his merciless jealousy placed him once again, so that he might be effectively wounded by Odette's admission, in the position of a man who does not yet know the truth; and after several months this old story would still dumbfounder him, like a sudden revelation. He marvelled at the terrible recreative power of his memory. It was only by the weakening of that generative force, whose fecundity diminishes as age creeps over one, that he could hope for a relaxation of his torments. But, as soon as the power that any one of Odette's sentences had to make Swann suffer seemed to be nearly exausted, lo and behold another, one of those to which he had hitherto paid least attention, almost a new sentence, came to relieve the first, and to strike at him with undiminished force. The memory of the evening on which he had dined with the Princesse des Laumes was painful to him, but it was no more than the centre, the core of his pain. That radiated vaguely round about it, overflowing into all the preceding and following days. And on whatever point in it he might intend his memory to rest, it was the whole of that season, during which the Verdurins had so often gone to dine upon the Island in the Bois, that sprang back to hurt him. So violently, that by slow degrees the curiosity which his jealousy was ever exciting in him was neutralised by his fear of the fresh tortures which he would be inflicting upon himself were he to satisfy it. He recognised that all the period of Odette's life which had elapsed before she first met him, a period of which he had never sought to form any picture in his mind, was not the featureless abstraction which he could vaguely see, but had consisted of so many definite, dated years, each crowded with concrete incidents. But were he to learn more of them, he feared lest her past, now colourless, fluid and supportable, might assume a tangible, an obscene form, with individual and diabolical features. And he continued to refrain from seeking a conception of it, not any longer now from laziness of mind, but from fear of suffering. He hoped that, some day, he might be able to hear the Island in the Bois, or the Princesse des Laumes mentioned without feeling any twinge of that old rending pain; meanwhile he thought it imprudent to provoke Odette into furnishing him with fresh sentences, with the names of more places and people and of different events, which, when his malady was still scarcely healed, would make it break out again in another form.

But, often enough, the things that he did not know, that he dreaded, now, to learn, it was Odette herself who, spontaneously and without thought of what she did, revealed them to him; for the gap which her vices made between her actual life and the comparatively innocent life which Swann had believed, and often still believed his mistress to lead, was far wider than she knew. A vicious person, always affecting the same air of virtue before people whom he is anxious to keep from having any suspicion of his vices, has no register, no gauge at hand from which he may ascertain how far those vices (their continuous growth being imperceptible by himself) have gradually segregated him from the normal ways of life. In the course of their cohabitation, in Odette's mind, with the memory of those of her actions which she concealed from Swann, her other, her innocuous actions were gradually coloured, infected by these, without her being able to detect anything strange in them, without their causing any explosion in the particular region of herself in which she made them live, but when she related them to Swann, he was overwhelmed by the revelation of the duplicity to which they pointed. One day, he was trying—without hurting Odette—to discover from her whether she had ever had any dealings with procuresses. He was, as a matter of fact, convinced that she had not; the anonymous letter had put the idea into his mind, but in a purely mechanical way; it had been received there with no credulity, but it had, for all that, remained there, and Swann, wishing to be rid of the burden—a dead weight, but none the less disturbing—of this suspicion, hoped that Odette would now extirpate it for ever.

"Oh dear, no! Not that they don't simply persecute me to go to them," her smile revealed a gratified vanity which she no longer saw that it was impossible should appear legitimate to Swann. "There was one of them waited more than two hours for me yesterday, said she would give me any money I asked. It seems, there's an Ambassador who said to her, 'I'll kill myself if you don't bring her to me'—meaning me! They told her I'd gone out, but she waited and waited, and in the end I had to go myself and speak to her, before she'd go away. I do wish you could have seen the way I tackled her; my maid was in the next room, listening, and told me I shouted fit to bring the house down:—'But when you hear me say that I don't want to! The idea of such a thing, I don't like it at all! I should hope I'm still free to do as I please and when I please and where I please! If I needed the money, I could understand . . .' The porter has orders not to let her in again; he will tell her that I am out of town. Oh, I do wish I could have had you hidden somewhere in the room while I was talking to her. I know, you'd have been pleased, my dear. There's some good in your little Odette, you see, after all, though people do say such dreadful things about her."

Besides, her very admissions—when she made any—of faults which she supposed him to have discovered, rather served Swann as a starting-point for fresh doubts than they put an end to the old. For her admissions never exactly coincided with his doubts. In vain might Odette expurgate her confession of all its essential part, there would remain in the accessories something which Swann had never yet imagined, which crushed him anew, and was to enable him to alter the terms of the problem of his jealousy. And these admissions he could never forget. His spirit carried them along, cast them aside, then cradled them again in its bosom, like corpses in a river. And they poisoned it.

She spoke to him once of a visit that Forcheville had paid her on the day of the Paris-Murcie Fête. "What! you knew him as long ago as that?

Oh, yes, of course you did," he corrected himself, so as not to shew that he had been ignorant of the fact. And suddenly he began to tremble at the thought that, on the day of the Paris-Murcie Fête, when he had received that letter which he had so carefully preserved, she had been having luncheon, perhaps, with Forcheville at the Maison d'Or. She swore that she had not. "Still, the Maison d'Or reminds me of something or other which, I knew at the time, wasn't true," he pursued, hoping to frighten her. "Yes, that I hadn't been there at all that evening when I told you I had just come from there, and you had been looking for me at Prévost's," she replied (judging by his manner that he knew) with a firmness that was based not so much upon cynicism as upon timidity, a fear of crossing Swann, which her own self-respect made her anxious to conceal, and a desire to shew him that she could be perfectly frank if she chose. And so she struck him with all the sharpness and force of a headsman wielding his axe, and yet could not be charged with cruelty, since she was quite unconscious of hurting him; she even began to laugh, though this may perhaps, it is true, have been chiefly to keep him from thinking that she was ashamed, at all, or confused. "It's quite true, I hadn't been to the Maison Dorée. I was coming away from Forcheville's. I had, really, been to Prévost's—that wasn't a story—and he met me there and asked me to come in and look at his prints. But some one else came to see him. I told you that I was coming from the Maison d'Or because I was afraid you might be angry with me. It was rather nice of me, really, don't you see? I admit, I did wrong, but at least I'm telling you all about it now, a'n't I? What have I to gain by not telling you, straight, that I lunched with him on the day of the Paris-Murcie Fête, if it were true? Especially as at that time we didn't know one another quite so well as we do now, did we, dear?"

He smiled back at her with the sudden, craven weakness of the utterly spiritless creature which these crushing words had made of him. And so, even in the months of which he had never dared to think again, because they had been too happy, in those months when she had loved him, she was already lying to him! Besides that moment (that first evening on which they had "done a cattleya") when she had told him that she was coming from the Maison Dorée, how many others must there have been, each of them covering a falsehood of which Swann had had no suspicion. He recalled how she had said to him once: "I need only tell Mme. Verdurin that my dress wasn't ready, or that my cab came late. There is always some excuse." From himself too, probably, many times when she had glibly uttered such words as explain a delay or justify an alteration of the hour fixed for a meeting, those moments must have hidden, without his having the least inkling of it at the time, an engagement that she had had with some other man, some man to whom she had said: "I need only tell Swann that my dress wasn't ready, or that my cab came late. There is always some excuse." And beneath all his most pleasant memories, beneath the simplest words that Odette had ever spoken to him in those old days, words which he had believed as though they were the words of a Gospel, beneath her daily actions which she had recounted to him, beneath the most ordinary places, her dressmaker's flat, the Avenue du Bois, the Hippodrome, he could feel (dissembled there, by virtue of that temporal superfluity which, after the most detailed account of how a day has been spent, always leaves something over, that may serve as a hiding place for certain unconfessed actions), he could feel the insinuation of a possible undercurrent of falsehood which debased for him all that had remained most precious, his happiest evenings, the Rue La Pérouse itself, which Odette must constantly have been leaving at other hours than those of which she told him; extending the power of the dark horror that had gripped him when he had heard her admission with regard to the Maison Dorée, and, like the obscene creatures in the 'Desolation of Nineveh,' shattering, stone by stone, the whole edifice of his past. . . . If, now, he turned aside whenever his memory repeated the cruel name of the Maison Dorée it was because that name recalled to him, no longer, as, such a little time since, at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's party, the good fortune which he long had lost, but a misfortune of which he was now first aware. Then it befell the Maison Dorée, as it had befallen the Island in the Bois, that gradually its name ceased to trouble him. For what we suppose to be our love, our jealousy are, neither of them, single, continuous and individual passions. They are composed of an infinity of successive loves, of different jealousies, each of which is ephemeral, although by their uninterrupted multitude they give us the impression of continuity, the illusion of unity. The life of Swann's love, the fidelity of his jealousy, were formed out of death, of infidelity, of innumerable desires, innumerable doubts, all of which had Odette for their object. If he had remained for any length of time without seeing her, those that died would not have been replaced by others. But the presence of Odette continued to sow in Swann's heart alternate seeds of love and suspicion.

On certain evenings she would suddenly resume towards him a kindness of which she would warn him sternly that he must take immediate advantage, under penalty of not seeing it repeated for years to come; he must instantly accompany her home, to "do a cattleya," and the desire which she pretended to have for him was so sudden, so inexplicable, so imperious, the kisses which she lavished on him were so demonstrative and so unfamiliar, that this brutal and unnatural fondness made Swann just as unhappy as any lie or unkind action. One evening when he had thus, in obedience to her command, gone home with her, and while she was interspersing her kisses with passionate words, in strange contrast to her habitual coldness, he thought suddenly that he heard a sound; he rose, searched everywhere and found nobody, but he had not the courage to return to his place by her side; whereupon she, in a towering rage, broke a vase, with "I never can do anything right with you, you impossible person!" And he was left uncertain whether she had not actually had some man concealed in the room, whose jealousy she had wished to wound, or else to inflame his senses.

Sometimes he repaired to 'gay' houses, hoping to learn something about Odette, although he dared not mention her name. "I have a little thing here, you're sure to like," the 'manageress' would greet him, and he would stay for an hour or so, talking dolefully to some poor girl who sat there astonished that he went no further. One of them, who was still quite young and attractive, said to him once, "Of course, what I should like would be to find a real friend, then he might be quite certain, I should never go with any other men again." "Indeed, do you think it possible for a woman really to be touched by a man's being in love with her, and never to be unfaithful to him?" asked Swann anxiously. "Why, surely! It all depends on their characters!" Swann could not help making the same remarks to these girls as would have delighted the Princesse des Laumes. To the one who was in search of a friend he said, with a smile: "But how nice of you, you've put on blue eyes, to go with your sash." "And you too, you've got blue cuffs on." "What a charming conversation we are having, for a place of this sort! I'm not boring you, am I; or keeping you?" "No, I've nothing to do, thank you. If you bored me I should say so. But I love hearing you talk." "I am highly flattered. . . . Aren't we behaving prettily?" he asked the 'manageress,' who had just looked in. "Why, yes, that's just what I was saying to myself, how sensibly they're behaving! But that's how it is! People come to my house now, just to talk. The Prince was telling me, only the other day, that he's far more comfortable here than with his wife. It seems that, nowadays, all the society ladies are like that; a perfect scandal, I call it. But I'll leave you in peace now, I know when I'm not wanted," she ended discreetly, and left Swann with the girl who had the blue eyes. But presently he rose and said good-bye to her. She had ceased to interest him. She did not know Odette.

The painter having been ill, Dr. Cottard recommended a sea-voyage; several of the 'faithful' spoke of accompanying him; the Verdurins could not face the prospect of being left alone in Paris, so first of all hired, and finally purchased a yacht; thus Odette was constantly going on a cruise. Whenever she had been away for any length of time, Swann would feel that he was beginning to detach himself from her, but, as though this moral distance were proportionate to the physical distance between them, whenever he heard that Odette had returned to Paris, he could not rest without seeing her. Once, when they had gone away, as everyone thought, for a month only, either they succumbed to a series of temptations, or else M. Verdurin had cunningly arranged everything beforehand, to please his wife, and disclosed his plans to the 'faithful' only as time went on; anyhow, from Algiers they flitted to Tunis; then to Italy, Greece, Constantinople, Asia Minor. They had been absent for nearly a year, and Swann felt perfectly at ease and almost happy. Albeit M. Verdurin had endeavoured to persuade the pianist and Dr. Cottard that their respective aunt and patients had no need of them, and that, in any event, it was most rash to allow Mme. Cottard to return to Paris, where, Mme. Verdurin assured him, a revolution had just broken out, he was obliged to grant them their liberty at Constantinople. And the painter came home with them. One day, shortly after the return of these four travellers, Swann, seeing an omnibus approach him, labelled 'Luxembourg,' and having some business there, had jumped on to it and had found himself sitting opposite Mme. Cottard, who was paying a round of visits to people whose 'day' it was, in full review order, with a plume in her hat, a silk dress, a muff, an umbrella (which would do for a parasol if the rain kept off), a card-case, and a pair of white gloves fresh from the cleaners. Wearing these badges of rank, she would, in fine weather, go on foot from one house to another in the same neighbourhood, but when she had to proceed to another district, would make use of a transfer-ticket on the omnibus. For the first minute or two, until the natural courtesy of the woman broke through the starched surface of the doctor's-wife, not being certain, either, whether she ought to mention the Verdurins before Swann, she produced, quite naturally, in her slow and awkward, but not unattractive voice, which, every now and then, was completely drowned by the rattling of the omnibus, topics selected from those which she had picked up and would repeat in each of the score of houses up the stairs of which she clambered in the course of an afternoon.

"I needn't ask you, M. Swann, whether a man so much in the movement as yourself has been to the Mirlitons, to see the portrait by Machard that the whole of Paris is running after. Well, and what do you think of it? Whose camp are you in, those who bless or those who curse? It's the same in every house in Paris now, no one will speak of anything else but Machard's portrait; you aren't smart, you aren't really cultured, you aren't up-to-date unless you give an opinion on Machard's portrait."

Swann having replied that he had not seen this portrait, Mme. Cottard was afraid that she might have hurt his feelings by obliging him to confess the omission.

"Oh, that's quite all right! At least you have the courage to be quite frank about it. You don't consider yourself disgraced because you haven't seen Machard's portrait. I do think that so nice of you. Well now, I have seen it; opinion is divided, you know, there are some people who find it rather laboured, like whipped cream, they say; but I think it's just ideal. Of course, she's not a bit like the blue and yellow ladies that our friend Biche paints. That's quite clear. But I must tell you, perfectly frankly (you'll think me dreadfully old-fashioned, but I always say just what I think), that I don't understand his work. I can quite see the good points there are in his portrait of my husband; oh, dear me, yes; and it's certainly less odd than most of what he does, but even then he had to give the poor man a blue moustache! But Machard! Just listen to this now, the husband of my friend, I am on my way to see at this very moment (which has given me the very great pleasure of your company), has promised her that, if he is elected to the Academy (he is one of the Doctor's colleagues), he will get Machard to paint her portrait. So she's got something to look forward to! I have another friend who insists that she'd rather have Leloir. I'm only a wretched Philistine, and I've no doubt Leloir has perhaps more knowledge of painting even than Machard. But I do think that the most important thing about a portrait, especially when it's going to cost ten thousand francs, is that it should be like, and a pleasant likeness, if you know what I mean."

Having exhausted this topic, to which she had been inspired by the loftiness of her plume, the monogram on her card-case, the little number inked inside each of her gloves by the cleaner, and the difficulty of speaking to

Swann about the Verdurins, Mme. Cottard, seeing that they had still a long way to go before they would reach the corner of the Rue Bonaparte, where the conductor was to set her down, listened to the promptings of her heart, which counselled other words than these.

"Your ears must have been burning," she ventured, "while we were on the yacht with Mme. Verdurin. We were talking about you all the time."

Swann was genuinely astonished, for he supposed that his name was never uttered in the Verdurins' presence.

"You see," Mme. Cottard went on, "Mme. de Crécy was there; need I say more? When Odette is anywhere it's never long before she begins talking about you. And you know quite well, it isn't nasty things she says. What! you don't believe me!" she went on, noticing that Swann looked sceptical. And, carried away by the sincerity of her conviction, without putting any evil meaning into the word, which she used purely in the sense in which one employs it to speak of the affection that unites a pair of friends: "Why, she *adores* you! No, indeed; I'm sure it would never do to say anything against you when she was about; one would soon be taught one's place! Whatever we might be doing, if we were looking at a picture, for instance, she would say, 'If only we had him here, he's the man who could tell us whether it's genuine or not. There's no one like him for that.' And all day long she would be saying, 'What can he be doing just now? I do hope, he's doing a little work! It's too dreadful that a fellow with such gifts as he has should be so lazy.' (Forgive me, won't you.) 'I can see him this very moment; he's thinking of us, he's wondering where we are.' Indeed, she used an expression which I thought very pretty at the time. M. Verdurin asked her, 'How in the world can you see what he's doing, when he's a thousand miles away?' And Odette answered, 'Nothing is impossible to the eye of a friend.'

"No, I assure you, I'm not saying it just to flatter you; you have a true friend in her, such as one doesn't often find. I can tell you, besides, in case you don't know it, that you're the only one. Mme. Verdurin told me as much herself on our last day with them (one talks more freely, don't you know, before a parting), 'I don't say that Odette isn't fond of us, but anything that we may say to her counts for very little beside what Swann might say.' Oh, mercy, there's the conductor stopping for me; here have I been chatting away to you, and would have gone right past the Rue Bonaparte, and never noticed. . . Will you be so very kind as to tell me whether my plume is straight?"

And Mme. Cottard withdrew from her muff, to offer it to Swann, a white-gloved hand from which there floated, with a transfer-ticket, an atmosphere of fashionable life that pervaded the omnibus, blended with the harsher fragrance of newly cleaned kid. And Swann felt himself overflowing with gratitude to her, as well as to Mme. Verdurin (and almost to Odette, for the feeling that he now entertained for her was no longer tinged with pain, was scarcely even to be described, now, as love), while from the platform of the omnibus he followed her with loving eyes, as she gallantly threaded her way along the Rue Bonaparte, her plume erect, her skirt held up in one hand, while in the other she clasped her umbrella and her card-case, so that its monogram could be seen, her muff dancing in the air before her as she went.

To compete with and so to stimulate the moribund feelings that Swann had for Odette, Mme. Cottard, a wiser physician, in this case, than ever her husband would have been, had grafted among them others more normal, feelings of gratitude, of friendship, which in Swann's mind were to make Odette seem again more human (more like other women, since other women could inspire the same feelings in him), were to hasten her final transformation back into that Odette, loved with an undisturbed affection, who had taken him home one evening after a revel at the painter's, to drink orangeade with Forcheville, that Odette with whom Swann had calculated that he might live in happiness.

In former times, having often thought with terror that a day must come when he would cease to be in love with Odette, he had determined to keep a sharp look-out, and as soon as he felt that love was beginning to escape him, to cling tightly to it and to hold it back. But now, to the faintness of his love there corresponded a simultaneous faintness in his desire to remain her lover. For a man cannot change, that is to say become another person, while he continues to obey the dictates of the self which he has ceased to be. Occasionally the name, if it caught his eye in a newspaper, of one of the men whom he supposed to have been Odette's lovers, reawakened his jealousy. But it was very slight, and, inasmuch as it proved to him that he had not completely emerged from that period in which he had so keenly suffered—though in it he had also known a way of feeling so intensely happy—and that the accidents of his course might still enable him to catch an occasional glimpse, stealthily and at a distance, of its beauties, this jealousy gave him, if anything, an agreeable thrill, as to the sad Parisian, when he has left Venice behind him and must return to France, a last mosquito proves that Italy and summer are still not too remote. But, as a rule, with this particular period of his life from which he was emerging, when he made an effort, if not to remain in it, at least to obtain, while still he might, an uninterrupted view of it, he discovered that already it was too late; he would have looked back to distinguish, as it might be a landscape that was about to disappear, that love from which he had departed, but it is so difficult to enter into a state of complete duality and to present to oneself the lifelike spectacle of a feeling which one has ceased to possess, that very soon, the clouds gathering in his brain, he could see nothing, he would abandon the attempt, would take the glasses from his nose and wipe them; and he told himself that he would do better to rest for a little, that there would be time enough later on, and settled back into his corner with as little curiosity, with as much torpor as the drowsy traveller who pulls his cap down over his eyes so as to get some sleep in the railway-carriage that is drawing him, he feels, faster and faster, out of the country in which he has lived for so long, and which he vowed that he would not allow to slip away from him without looking out to bid it a last farewell. Indeed, like the same traveller, if he does not awake until he has crossed the frontier and is again in France, when Swann happened to alight, close at hand, upon something which proved that Forcheville had been Odette's lover, he discovered that it caused him no pain, that love was now utterly remote, and he regretted that he had had no warning of the moment in which he had emerged from it for ever. And just as, before kissing Odette for the first time, he had sought to imprint upon his memory the face that for so long had been familiar, before it was altered by the additional memory of their kiss, so he could have wished—in thought at least—to have been in a position to bid farewell, while she still existed, to that Odette who had inspired love in him and jealousy, to that Odette who had caused him so to suffer, and whom now he would never see again. He was mistaken. He was destined to see her once again, a few weeks later. It was while he was asleep, in the twilight of a dream. He was walking with Mme. Verdurin, Dr. Cottard, a young man in a fez whom he failed to identify, the painter, Odette, Napoleon III and my grandfather, along a path which followed the line of the coast, and overhung the sea, now at a great height, now by a few feet only, so that they were continually going up and down; those of the party who had reached the downward slope were no longer visible to those who were still climbing; what little daylight yet remained was failing, and it seemed as though a black night was immediately to fall on them. Now and then the waves dashed against the cliff, and Swann could feel on his cheek a shower of freezing spray. Odette told him to wipe this off, but he could not, and felt confused and helpless in her company, as well as because he was in his nightshirt. He hoped that, in the darkness, this might pass unnoticed; Mme. Verdurin, however, fixed her astonished gaze upon him for an endless moment, in which he saw her face change its shape, her nose grow longer, while beneath it there sprouted a heavy moustache. He turned away to examine Odette; her cheeks were pale, with little fiery spots, her features drawn and ringed with shadows; but she looked back at him with eyes welling with affection, ready to detach themselves like tears and to fall upon his face, and he felt that he loved her so much that he would have liked to carry her off with him at once. Suddenly Odette turned her wrist, glanced at a tiny watch, and said: "I must go." She took leave of everyone, in the same formal manner, without taking Swann aside, without telling him where they were to meet that evening, or next day. He dared not ask, he would have liked to follow her, he was obliged, without turning back in her direction, to answer with a smile some question by Mme. Verdurin; but his heart was frantically beating, he felt that he now hated Odette, he would gladly have crushed those eyes which, a moment ago, he had loved so dearly, have torn the blood into those lifeless cheeks. He continued to climb with Mme. Verdurin, that is to say that each step took him farther from Odette, who was going downhill, and in the other direction. A second passed and it was many hours since she had left him. The painter remarked to Swann that Napoleon III had eclipsed himself immediately after Odette. "They had obviously arranged it between them," he added; "they must have agreed to meet at the foot of the cliff, but they wouldn't say good-bye together; it might have looked odd. She is his mistress." The strange young man burst into tears. Swann endeavoured to console him. "After all, she is quite right," he said to the young man, drying his eyes for him and taking off the fez to make him feel more at ease. "I've advised her to do that, myself, a dozen times. Why be so distressed? He was obviously the man to understand her." So Swann reasoned with himself, for the young man whom he had failed, at first, to identify, was himself also; like certain novelists, he had distributed his own personality between two characters, him who was the 'first person' in the dream, and another whom he saw before him, capped with a fez.

As for Napoleon III, it was to Forcheville that some vague association of ideas, then a certain modification of the Baron's usual physiognomy, and lastly the broad ribbon of the Legion of Honour across his breast, had made Swann give that name; but actually, and in everything that the person who appeared in his dream represented and recalled to him, it was indeed Forcheville. For, from an incomplete and changing set of images, Swann in his sleep drew false deductions, enjoying, at the same time, such creative power that he was able to reproduce himself by a simple act of division, like certain lower organisms; with the warmth that he felt in his own palm he modelled the hollow of a strange hand which he thought that he was clasping, and out of feelings and impressions of which he was not yet conscious, he brought about sudden vicissitudes which, by a chain of logical sequences, would produce, at definite points in his dream, the person required to receive his love or to startle him awake. In an instant night grew black about him; an alarum rang, the inhabitants ran past him, escaping from their blazing houses; he could hear the thunder of the surging waves, and also of his own heart, which, with equal violence, was anxiously beating in his breast. Suddenly the speed of these palpitations redoubled, he felt a pain, a nausea that were inexplicable; a peasant, dreadfully burned, flung at him as he passed: "Come and ask Charlus where Odette spent the night with her friend. He used to go about with her, and she tells him everything. It was they that started the fire." It was his valet, come to awaken him, and saying:—

"Sir, it is eight o'clock, and the barber is here. I have told him to call again in an hour."

But these words, as they dived down through the waves of sleep in which Swann was submerged, did not reach his consciousness without undergoing that refraction which turns a ray of light, at the bottom of a bowl of water, into another sun; just as, a moment earlier, the sound of the door-bell, swelling in the depths of his abyss of sleep into the clangour of an alarum, had engendered the episode of the fire. Meanwhile the scenery of his dream-stage scattered in dust, he opened his eyes, heard for the last time the boom of a wave in the sea, grown very distant. He touched his cheek. It was dry. And yet he could feel the sting of the cold spray, and the taste of salt on his lips. He rose, and dressed himself. He had made the barber come early because he had written, the day before, to my grandfather, to say that he was going, that afternoon, to Combray, having learned that Mme. de Cambremer—Mlle. Legrandin that had been —was spending a few days there. The association in his memory of her young and charming face with a place in the country which he had not visited for so long, offered him a combined attraction which had made him decide at last to leave Paris for a while. As the different changes and chances that bring us into the company of certain other people in this life do not coincide with the periods in which we are in love with those people, but, overlapping them, may occur before love has begun, and may be repeated after love is ended, the earliest appearances, in our life, of a creature who is destined to afford us pleasure later on, assume retrospectively in our eyes a certain value as an indication, a warning, a presage. It was in this fashion that Swann had often carried back his mind to the image of Odette, encountered in the theatre, on that first evening when he had no thought of ever seeing her again—and that he now recalled the party at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's, at which he had introduced General de Froberville to Mme. de Cambremer. So manifold are our interests in life that it is not uncommon that, on a single occasion, the foundations of a happiness which does not yet exist are laid down simultaneously with aggravations of a grief from which we are still suffering. And, no doubt, that might have occurred to Swann elsewhere than at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's. Who, indeed, can say whether, in the event of his having gone, that evening, somewhere else, other happinesses, other griefs would not have come to him, which, later, would have appeared to have been inevitable? But what did seem to him to have been inevitable was what had indeed taken place, and he was not far short of seeing something providential in the fact that he had at last decided to go to Mme. de Saint-Euverte's that evening, because his mind, anxious to admire the richness of invention that life shews, and incapable of facing a difficult problem for any length of time, such as to discover what, actually, had been most to be wished for, came to the conclusion that the sufferings through which he had passed that evening, and the pleasures, at that time unsuspected, which were already being brought to birth,—the exact balance between which was too difficult to establish—were linked by a sort of concatenation of necessity.

But while, an hour after his awakening, he was giving instructions to the barber, so that his stiffly brushed hair should not become disarranged on the journey, he thought once again of his dream; he saw once again, as he had felt them close beside him, Odette's pallid complexion, her too thin cheeks, her drawn features, her tired eyes, all the things which—in the course of those successive bursts of affection which had made of his enduring love for Odette a long oblivion of the first impression that he had formed of her—he had ceased to observe after the first few days of their intimacy, days to which, doubtless, while he slept, his memory had returned to seek the exact sensation of those things. And with that old, intermittent fatuity, which reappeared in him now that he was no longer unhappy, and lowered, at the same time, the average level of his morality, he cried out in his heart: "To think that I have wasted years of my life, that I have longed for death, that the greatest love that I have ever known has been for a woman who did not please me, who was not in my style!"

PLACE-NAMES: THE NAME

Among the rooms which used most commonly to take shape in my mind during my long nights of sleeplessness, there was none that differed more utterly from the rooms at Combray, thickly powdered with the motes of an atmosphere granular, pollenous, edible and instinct with piety, than my room in the Grand Hôtel de la Plage, at Balbec, the walls of which, washed with ripolin, contained, like the polished sides of a basin in which the water glows with a blue, lurking fire, a finer air, pure, azure-tinted, saline. The Bavarian upholsterer who had been entrusted with the furnishing of this hotel had varied his scheme of decoration in different rooms, and in that which I found myself occupying had set against the walls, on three sides of it, a series of low book-cases with glass fronts, in which, according to where they stood, by a law of nature which he had, perhaps, forgotten to take into account, was reflected this or that section of the ever-changing view of the sea, so that the walls were lined with a frieze of sea-scapes, interrupted only by the polished mahogany of the actual shelves. And so effective was this that the whole room had the appearance of one of those model bedrooms which you see nowadays in Housing Exhibitions, decorated with works of art which are calculated by their designer to refresh the eyes of whoever may ultimately have to sleep in the rooms, the subjects being kept in some degree of harmony with the locality and surroundings of the houses for which the rooms are planned.

And yet nothing could have differed more utterly, either, from the real Balbec than that other Balbec of which I had often dreamed, on stormy days, when the wind was so strong that Françoise, as she took me to the Champs-Elysées, would warn me not to walk too near the side of the street, or I might have my head knocked off by a falling slate, and would recount to me, with many lamentations, the terrible disasters and shipwrecks that were reported in the newspaper. I longed for nothing more than to behold a storm at sea, less as a mighty spectacle than as a momentary revelation of the true life of nature; or rather there were for me no mighty spectacles save those which I knew to be not artificially composed for my entertainment, but necessary and unalterable,—the beauty of landscapes or of great works of art. I was not curious, I did not thirst to know anything save what I believed to be more genuine than myself, what had for me the supreme merit of shewing me a fragment of the mind of a great genius, or of the force or the grace of nature as she appeared when left entirely to herself, without human interference. Just as the lovely sound of her voice, reproduced, all by itself, upon the phonograph, could never console a man for the loss of his mother, so a mechanical imitation of a storm would have left me as cold as did the illuminated fountains at the Exhibition. I required also, if the storm was to be absolutely genuine, that the shore from which I watched it should be a natural shore, not an embankment recently constructed by a municipality. Besides, nature, by all the feelings that she aroused in me, seemed to me the most opposite thing in the world to the mechanical inventions of mankind. The less she bore their imprint, the more room she offered for the expansion of my heart. And, as it happened, I had preserved the name of Balbec, which Legrandin had cited to us, as that of a sea-side place in the very midst of "that funereal coast, famed for the number of its wrecks, swathed, for six months in the year, in a shroud of fog and flying foam from the waves.

"You feel, there, below your feet still," he had told me, "far more even than at Finistère (and even though hotels are now being superimposed upon it, without power, however, to modify that oldest bone in the earth's skeleton) you feel there that you are actually at the land's end of France, of Europe, of the Old World. And it is the ultimate encampment of the fishermen, precisely like the fishermen who have lived since the world's beginning, facing the everlasting kingdom of the sea-fogs and shadows of the night." One day when, at Combray, I had spoken of this coast, this Balbec, before M. Swann, hoping to learn from him whether it was the best point to select for seeing the most violent storms, he had replied: "I should think I did know Balbec! The church at Balbec, built in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and still half romanesque, is perhaps the most curious example to be found of our Norman gothic, and so exceptional that one is tempted to describe it as Persian in its inspiration." And that region, which, until then, had seemed to me to be nothing else than a part of immemorial nature, that had remained contemporaneous with the great phenomena of geology—and as remote from human history as the Ocean itself, or the Great Bear, with its wild race of fishermen for whom, no more than for their whales, had there been any Middle Ages—it had been a great joy to me to see it suddenly take its place in the order of the centuries, with a stored consciousness of the romanesque epoch, and to know that the gothic trefoil had come to diversify those wild rocks also, at the appointed hour, like those frail but hardy plants which, in the Polar regions, when the spring returns, scatter their stars about the eternal snows. And if gothic art brought to those places and people a classification which, otherwise, they lacked, they too conferred one upon it in return. I tried to form a picture in my mind of how those fishermen had lived, the timid and unsuspected essay towards social intercourse which they had attempted there, clustered upon a promontory of the shores of Hell, at the foot of the cliffs of death; and gothic art seemed to me a more living thing now that, detaching it from the towns in which, until then, I had always imagined it, I could see how, in a particular instance, upon a reef of savage rocks, it had taken root and grown until it flowered in a tapering spire. I was taken to see reproductions of the most famous of the statues at Balbec,—shaggy, blunt-faced Apostles, the Virgin from the porch,—and I could scarcely breathe for joy at the thought that I might myself, one day, see them take a solid form against their eternal background of salt fog. Thereafter, on dear, tempestuous February nights, the wind—

breathing into my heart, which it shook no less violently than the chimney of my bedroom, the project of a visit to Balbec—blended in me the desire for gothic architecture with that for a storm upon the sea.

I should have liked to take, the very next day, the good, the generous train at one twenty-two, of which never without a palpitating heart could I read, in the railway company's bills or in advertisements of circular tours, the hour of departure: it seemed to me to cut, at a precise point in every afternoon, a most fascinating groove, a mysterious mark, from which the diverted hours still led one on, of course, towards evening, towards to-morrow morning, but to an evening and morning which one would behold, not in Paris but in one of those towns through which the train passed and among which it allowed one to choose; for it stopped at Bayeux, at Coutances, at Vitré, at Questambert, at Pontorson, at Balbec, at Lannion, at Lamballe, at Benodet, at Pont-Aven, at Quimperlé, and progressed magnificently surcharged with names which it offered me, so that, among them all, I did not know which to choose, so impossible was it to sacrifice any. But even without waiting for the train next day, I could, by rising and dressing myself with all speed, leave Paris that very evening, should my parents permit, and arrive at Balbec as dawn spread westward over the raging sea, from whose driven foam I would seek shelter in that church in the Persian manner. But at the approach of the Easter holidays, when my parents had promised to let me spend them, for once, in the North of Italy, lo! in place of those dreams of tempests, by which I had been entirely possessed, not wishing to see anything but waves dashing in from all sides, mounting always higher, upon the wildest of coasts, beside churches as rugged and precipitous as cliffs, in whose towers the sea-birds would be wailing; suddenly, effacing them, taking away all their charm, excluding them because they were its opposite and could only have weakened its effect, was substituted in me the converse dream of the most variegated of springs, not the spring of Combray, still pricking with all the needle-points of the winter's frost, but that which already covered with lilies and anemones the meadows of Fiesole, and gave Florence a dazzling golden background, like those in Fra Angelico's pictures. From that moment, only sunlight, perfumes, colours, seemed to me to have any value; for this alternation of images had effected a change of front in my desire, and—as abrupt as those that occur sometimes in music,—a complete change of tone in my sensibility. Thus it came about that a mere atmospheric variation would be sufficient to provoke in me that modulation, without there being any need for me to await the return of a season. For often we find a day, in one, that has strayed from another season, and makes us live in that other, summons at once into our presence and makes us long for its peculiar pleasures, and interrupts the dreams that we were in process of weaving, by inserting, out of its turn, too early or too late, this leaf, torn from another chapter, in the interpolated calendar of Happiness. But soon it happened that, like those natural phenomena from which our comfort or our health can derive but an accidental and all too modest benefit, until the day when science takes control of them, and, producing them at will, places in our hands the power to order their appearance, withdrawn from the tutelage and independent of the consent of chance; similarly the production of these dreams of the Atlantic and of Italy ceased to depend entirely upon the changes of the seasons and of the weather. I need only, to make them reappear, pronounce the names: Balbec, Venice, Florence, within whose syllables had gradually accumulated all the longing inspired in me by the places for which they stood. Even in spring, to come in a book upon the name of Balbec sufficed to awaken in me the desire for storms at sea and for the Norman gothic; even on a stormy day the name of Florence or of Venice would awaken the desire for sunshine, for lilies, for the Palace of the Doges and for Santa Maria del Fiore.

But if their names thus permanently absorbed the image that I had formed of these towns, it was only by transforming that image, by subordinating its reappearance in me to their own special laws; and in consequence of this they made it more beautiful, but at the same time more different from anything that the towns of Normandy or Tuscany could in reality be, and, by increasing the arbitrary delights of my imagination, aggravated the disenchantment that was in store for me when I set out upon my travels. They magnified the idea that I formed of certain points on the earth's surface, making them more special, and in consequence more real. I did not then represent to myself towns, landscapes, historic buildings, as pictures more or less attractive, cut out here and there of a substance that was common to them all, but looked on each of them as on an unknown thing, different from all the rest, a thing for which my soul was athirst, by the knowledge of which it would benefit. How much more individual still was the character that they assumed from being designated by names, names that were only for themselves, proper names such as people have. Words present to us little pictures of things, lucid and normal, like the pictures that are hung on the walls of schoolrooms to give children an illustration of what is meant by a carpenter's bench, a bird, an ant-hill; things chosen as typical of everything else of the same sort. But names present to us—of persons and of towns which they accustom us to regard as individual, as unique, like persons—a confused picture, which draws from the names, from the brightness or darkness of their sound, the colour in which it is uniformly painted, like one of those posters, entirely blue or entirely red, in which, on account of the limitations imposed by the process used in their reproduction, or by a whim on the designer's part, are blue or red not only the sky and the sea, but the ships and the church and the people in the streets. The name of Parma, one of the towns that I most longed to visit, after reading the *Chartreuse*, seeming to me compact and glossy, violet-tinted, soft, if anyone were to speak of such or such a house in Parma, in which I should be lodged, he would give me the pleasure of thinking that I was to inhabit a dwelling that was compact and glossy, violet-tinted, soft, and that bore no relation to the houses in any other town in Italy, since I could imagine it only by the aid of that heavy syllable of the name of Parma, in which no breath of air stirred, and of all that I had made it assume of Stendhalian sweetness and the reflected hue of violets. And when I thought of Florence, it was of a town miraculously embalmed, and flower-like, since it was called the City of the Lilies, and its Cathedral, Our Lady of the Flower. As for Balbec, it was one of those names in which, as on an old piece of Norman pottery that still keeps the colour of the earth from which it was fashioned, one sees depicted still the representation of some long-abolished custom, of some feudal right, of the former condition of some place, of an obsolete way of pronouncing the language, which had shaped and wedded its incongruous syllables and which I never doubted that I should find spoken there at once, even by the inn-keeper who would pour me out coffee and milk on my arrival, taking me down to watch the turbulent sea, unchained, before the church; to whom I lent the aspect, disputatious, solemn and mediaeval, of some character in one of the old romances.

Had my health definitely improved, had my parents allowed me, if not actually to go down to stay at Balbec, at least to take, just once, so as to become acquainted with the architecture and landscapes of Normandy or of Brittany, that one twenty-two train into which I had so often clambered in imagination, I should have preferred to stop, and to alight from it, at the most beautiful of its towns; but in vain might I compare and contrast them; how was one to choose, any more than between individual people, who are not interchangeable, between Bayeux, so lofty in its noble coronet of rusty lace, whose highest point caught the light of the old gold of its second syllable; Vitré, whose acute accent barred its ancient glass with wooden lozenges; gentle Lamballe, whose whiteness ranged from egg-shell yellow to a pearly grey; Coutances, a Norman Cathedral, which its final consonants, rich and yellowing, crowned with a tower of butter; Lannion with the rumble and buzz, in the silence of its village street, of the fly on the wheel of the coach; Questambert, Pontorson, ridiculously silly and simple, white feathers and yellow beaks strewn along the road to those well-watered and poetic spots; Benodet, a name scarcely moored that seemed to be striving to draw the river down into the tangle of its seaweeds; Pont-Aven, the snowy, rosy flight of the wing of a lightly poised coif, tremulously reflected in the greenish waters of a canal; Quimperlé, more firmly attached, this, and since the Middle Ages, among the rivulets with which it babbled, threading their pearls upon a grey background, like the pattern made, through the cobwebs upon a window, by rays of sunlight changed into blunt points of tarnished silver?

These images were false for another reason also; namely, that they were necessarily much simplified; doubtless the object to which my imagination aspired, which my senses took in but incompletely and without any immediate pleasure, I had committed to the safe custody of names; doubtless because I had accumulated there a store of dreams, those names now magnetised my desires; but names themselves are not very comprehensive; the most that I could do was to include in each of them two or three of the principal curiosities of the town, which would lie there side by side, without interval or partition; in the name of Balbec, as in the magnifying glasses set in those penholders which one buys at sea-side places, I could distinguish waves surging round a church built in the Persian manner. Perhaps, indeed, the enforced simplicity of these images was one of the reasons for the hold that they had over me. When my father had decided, one year, that we should go for the Easter holidays to Florence and Venice, not finding room to introduce into the name of Florence the elements that ordinarily constitute a town, I was obliged to let a supernatural city emerge from the impregnation by certain vernal scenes of what I supposed to be, in its essentials, the genius of Giotto. All the more—and because one cannot make a name extend much further in time than in space—like some of Giotto's paintings themselves which shew us at two separate moments the same person engaged in different actions, here lying on his bed, there just about to mount his horse, the name of Florence was divided into two compartments. In one, beneath an architectural dais, I gazed upon a fresco over which was partly drawn a curtain of morning sunlight, dusty, aslant, and gradually spreading; in the other (for, since I thought of names not as an inaccessible ideal but as a real and enveloping substance into which I was about to plunge, the life not yet lived, the life intact and pure which I enclosed in them, gave to the most material pleasures, to the simplest scenes, the same attraction that they have in the works of the Primitives), I moved swiftly—so as to arrive, as soon as might be, at the table that was spread for me, with fruit and a flask of Chianti—across a Ponte Vecchio heaped with jonquils, narcissi and anemones. That (for all that I was still in Paris) was what I saw, and not what was actually round about me. Even from the simplest, the most realistic point of view, the countries for which we long occupy, at any given moment, a far larger place in our true life than the country in which we may happen to be. Doubtless, if, at that time, I had paid more attention to what was in my mind when I pronounced the words "going to Florence, to Parma, to Pisa, to Venice," I should have realised that what I saw was in no sense a town, but something as different from anything that I knew, something as delicious as might be for a human race whose whole existence had passed in a series of late winter afternoons, that inconceivable marvel, a morning in spring. These images, unreal, fixed, always alike, filling all my nights and days, differentiated this period in my life from those which had gone before it (and might easily have been confused with it by an observer who saw things only from without, that is to say, who saw nothing), as in an opera a fresh melody introduces a novel atmosphere which one could never have suspected if one had done no more than read the libretto, still less if one had remained outside the theatre, counting only the minutes as they passed. And besides, even from the point of view of mere quantity, in our life the days are not all equal. To reach the end of a day, natures that are slightly nervous, as mine was, make use, like motor-cars, of different 'speeds.' There are mountainous, uncomfortable days, up which one takes an infinite time to pass, and days downward sloping, through which one can go at full tilt, singing as one goes. During this month—in which I went laboriously over, as over a tune, though never to my satisfaction, these visions of Florence, Venice, Pisa, from which the desire that they excited in me drew and kept something as profoundly personal as if it had been love, love for another person—I never ceased to believe that they corresponded to a reality independent of myself, and they made me conscious of as glorious a hope as could have been cherished by a Christian in the primitive age of faith, on the eve of his entry into Paradise. Moreover, without my paying any heed to the contradiction that there was in my wishing to look at and to touch with my organs of sense what had been elaborated by the spell of my dreams and not perceived by my senses at all—though all the more tempting to them, in consequence, more different from anything that they knew—it was that which recalled to me the reality of these visions, which inflamed my desire all the more by seeming to hint a promise that my desire should be satisfied. And for all that the motive force of my exaltation was a longing for aesthetic enjoyments, the guide-books ministered even more to it than books on aesthetics, and, more again than the guide-books, the railway time-tables. What moved me was the thought that this Florence which I could see, so near and yet inaccessible, in my imagination, if the tract which separated it from me, in myself, was not one that I might cross, could yet be reached by a circuit, by a digression, were I to take the plain, terrestrial path. When I repeated to myself, giving thus a special value to what I was going to see, that Venice was the "School of Giorgione, the home of Titian, the most complete museum of the domestic architecture of the Middle Ages," I felt happy indeed. As I was even more when, on one of my walks, as I stepped out briskly on account of the weather, which, after several days of a precocious spring, had relapsed into winter (like the weather that we had invariably found awaiting us at Combray, in Holy Week),—seeing upon the boulevards that the chestnut-trees, though plunged in a glacial atmosphere that soaked through them like a stream of water, were none the less beginning, punctual guests, arrayed already for the party, and admitting no discouragement, to shape and chisel and curve in its frozen lumps the irrepressible verdure whose steady growth the abortive power of the cold might hinder but could not succeed in restraining—I reflected that already the Ponte Vecchio was heaped high with an abundance of hyacinths and anemones, and that the spring sunshine was already tinging the waves of the Grand Canal with so dusky an azure, with emeralds so splendid that when they washed and were broken against the foot of one of Titian's paintings they could vie with it in the richness of their colouring. I could no longer contain my joy when my father, in the intervals of tapping the barometer and complaining of the cold, began to look out which were the best trains, and when I understood that by making one's way, after luncheon, into the coal-grimed laboratory, the wizard's cell that undertook to contrive a complete transmutation of its surroundings, one could awaken, next morning, in the city of marble and gold, in which "the building of the wall was of jasper and the foundation of the wall an emerald." So that it and the City of the Lilies were not just artificial scenes which I could set up at my pleasure in front of my imagination, but did actually exist at a certain distance from Paris which must inevitably be traversed if I wished to see them, at their appointed place on the earth's surface, and at no other; in a word they were entirely real. They became even more real to me when my father, by saying: "Well, you can stay in Venice from the 20th to the 29th, and reach Florence on Easter morning," made them both emerge, no longer only from the abstraction of Space, but from that imaginary Time in which we place not one, merely, but several of our travels at once, which do not greatly tax us since they are but possibilities,—that Time which reconstructs itself so effectively that one can spend it again in one town after one has already spent it in another—and consecrated to them some of those actual, calendar days which are certificates of the genuineness of what one does on them, for those unique days are consumed by being used, they do not return, one cannot live them again here when one has lived them elsewhere; I felt that it was towards the week that would begin with the Monday on which the laundress was to bring back the white waistcoat that I had stained with ink, that they were hastening to busy themselves with the duty of emerging from that ideal Time in which they did not, as yet, exist, those two Queen Cities of which I was soon to be able, by the most absorbing kind of geometry, to inscribe the domes and towers on a page of my own life. But I was still on the way, only, to the supreme pinnacle of happiness; I reached it finally (for not until then did the revelation burst upon me that on the clattering streets, reddened by the light reflected from Giorgione's frescoes, it was not, as I had, despite so many promptings, continued to imagine, the men "majestic and terrible as the sea, bearing armour that gleamed with bronze beneath the folds of their blood-red cloaks," who would be walking in Venice next week, on the Easter vigil; but that I myself might be the minute personage whom, in an enlarged photograph of St. Mark's that had been lent to me, the operator had portrayed, in a bowler hat, in front of the portico), when I heard my father say: "It must be pretty cold, still, on the Grand Canal; whatever you do, don't forget to pack your winter greatcoat and your thick suit." At these words I was raised to a sort of ecstasy; a thing that I had until then deemed impossible, I felt myself to be penetrating indeed between those "rocks of amethyst, like a reef in the Indian Ocean"; by a supreme muscular effort, a long way in excess of my real strength, stripping myself, as of a shell that served no purpose, of the air in my own room which surrounded me, I replaced it by an equal quantity of Venetian air, that marine atmosphere, indescribable and peculiar as the atmosphere of the dreams which my imagination had secreted in the name of Venice; I could feel at work within me a miraculous disincarnation; it was at once accompanied by that vague desire to vomit which one feels when one has a very sore throat; and they had to put me to bed with a fever so persistent that the doctor not only assured my parents that a visit, that spring, to Florence and Venice was absolutely out of the question, but warned them that, even when I should have completely recovered, I must, for at least a year, give up all idea of travelling, and be kept from anything that was liable to excite me.

And, alas, he forbade also, most categorically, my being allowed to go to the theatre, to hear Berma; the sublime artist, whose genius Bergotte had proclaimed, might, by introducing me to something else that was, perhaps, as important and as beautiful, have consoled me for not having been to Florence and Venice, for not going to Balbec. My parents had to be content with sending me, every day, to the Champs-Elysées, in the custody of a person who would see that I did not tire myself; this person was none other than Françoise, who had entered our service after the death of my aunt Léonie. Going to the Champs-Elysées I found unendurable. If only Bergotte had described the place in one of his books, I should, no doubt, have longed to see and to know it, like so many things else of which a simulacrum had first found its way into my imagination. That kept things warm, made them live, gave them personality, and I sought then to find their counterpart in reality, but in this public garden there was nothing that attached itself to my dreams.

⁂

One day, as I was weary of our usual place, beside the wooden horses, Françoise had taken me for an excursion—across the frontier guarded at regular intervals by the little bastions of the barley-sugar women—into those neighbouring but foreign regions, where the faces of the passers-by were strange, where the goat-carriage went past; then she had gone away to lay down her things on a chair that stood with its back to a shrubbery of laurels; while I waited for her I was pacing the broad lawn, of meagre close-cropped grass already faded by the sun, dominated, at its far end, by a statue rising from a fountain, in front of which a little girl with reddish hair was playing with a shuttlecock; when, from the path, another little girl, who was putting on her cloak and covering up her battledore, called out sharply: "Good-bye, Gilberte, I'm going home now; don't forget, we're coming to you this evening, after dinner." The name Gilberte passed close by me, evoking all the more forcibly her whom it labelled in that it did not merely refer to her, as one speaks of a man in his absence, but was directly addressed to her; it passed thus close by me, in action, so to speak, with a force that increased with the curve of its trajectory and as it drew near to its target;—carrying in its wake, I could feel, the knowledge, the impression of her to whom it was addressed that belonged not to me but to the friend who called to her, everything that, while she uttered the words, she more or less vividly reviewed, possessed in her memory, of their daily intimacy, of the visits that they paid to each other, of that unknown existence which was all the more inaccessible, all the more painful to me from being, conversely, so familiar, so tractable to this happy girl who let her message brush past me without my being able to penetrate its surface, who flung it on the air with a light-hearted cry: letting float in the atmosphere the delicious attar which that message had distilled, by touching them with precision, from certain invisible points in Mlle. Swann's life, from the evening to come, as it would be, after dinner, at her home,—forming, on its celestial passage through the midst of the children and their nursemaids, a little cloud, exquisitely coloured, like the cloud that, curling over one of Poussin's gardens, reflects minutely, like a cloud in the opera, teeming with chariots and horses, some apparition of the life of the gods; casting, finally, on that ragged grass, at the spot on which she stood (at once a scrap of withered lawn and a moment in the afternoon of the fair player, who continued to beat up and catch her shuttlecock until a governess, with a blue feather in her hat, had called her away) a marvellous little band of light, of the colour of heliotrope, spread over the lawn like a carpet on which I could not tire of treading to and fro with lingering feet, nostalgic and profane, while Françoise shouted: "Come on, button up your coat, look, and let's get away!" and I remarked for the first time how common her speech was, and that she had, alas, no blue feather in her hat.

Only, would *she* come again to the Champs-Elysées? Next day she was not there; but I saw her on the following days; I spent all my time revolving round the spot where she was at play with her friends, to such effect that once, when, they found, they were not enough to make up a prisoner's base, she sent one of them to ask me if I cared to complete their side, and from that day I played with her whenever she came. But this did not happen every day; there were days when she had been prevented from coming by her lessons, by her catechism, by a luncheon-party, by the whole of that life, separated from my own, which twice only, condensed into the name of Gilberte, I had felt pass so painfully close to me, in the hawthorn lane near Combray and on the grass of the Champs-Elysées. On such days she would have told us beforehand that we should not see her; if it were because of her lessons, she would say: "It is too tiresome, I sha'n't be able to come to-morrow; you will all be enjoying yourselves here without me," with an air of regret which to some extent consoled me; if, on the other hand, she had been invited to a party, and I, not knowing this, asked her whether she was coming to play with us, she would reply: "Indeed I hope not! Indeed I hope Mamma will let me go to my friend's." But on these days I did at least know that I should not see her, whereas on others, without any warning, her mother would take her for a drive, or some such thing, and next day she would say: "Oh, yes! I went out with Mamma," as though it had been the most natural thing in the world, and not the greatest possible misfortune for some one else. There were also the days of bad weather on which her governess, afraid, on her own account, of the rain, would not bring Gilberte to the Champs-Elysées.

And so, if the heavens were doubtful, from early morning I would not cease to interrogate them, observing all the omens. If I saw the lady opposite, just inside her window, putting on her hat, I would say to myself: "That lady is going out; it must, therefore, be weather in which one can go out. Why should not Gilberte do the same as that lady?" But the day grew dark. My mother said that it might clear again, that one burst of sunshine would be enough, but that more probably it would rain; and if it rained, of what use would it be to go to the Champs-Elysées? And so, from breakfast-time, my anxious eyes never left the uncertain, clouded sky. It remained dark. Outside the window, the balcony was grey. Suddenly, on its sullen stone, I did not indeed see a less negative colour, but I felt as it were an effort towards a less negative colour, the pulsation of a hesitating ray that struggled to discharge its light. A moment later the balcony was as pale and luminous as a standing water at dawn, and a thousand shadows from the iron-work of its balustrade had come to rest on it. A breath of wind dispersed them; the stone grew dark again, but, like tamed creatures, they returned; they began, imperceptibly, to grow lighter, and by one of those continuous crescendos, such as, in music, at the end of an overture, carry a single note to the extreme fortissimo, making it pass rapidly through all the intermediate stages, I saw it attain to that fixed, unalterable gold of fine days, on which the sharply cut shadows of the wrought iron of the balustrade were outlined in black like a capricious vegetation, with a fineness in the delineation of their smallest details which seemed to indicate a deliberate application, an artist's satisfaction, and with so much relief, so velvety a bloom in the restfulness of their sombre and happy mass that in truth those large and leafy shadows which lay reflected on that lake of sunshine seemed aware that they were pledges of happiness and peace of mind.

Brief, fading ivy, climbing, fugitive flora, the most colourless, the most depressing, to many minds, of all that creep on walls or decorate windows; to me the dearest of them all, from the day when it appeared upon our balcony, like the very shadow of the presence of Gilberte, who was perhaps already in the Champs-Elysées, and as soon as I arrived there would greet me with: "Let's begin at once. You are on my side." Frail, swept away by a breath, but at the same time in harmony, not with the season, with the hour; a promise of that immediate pleasure which the day will deny or fulfil, and thereby of the one paramount immediate pleasure, the pleasure of loving and of being loved; more soft, more warm upon the stone than even moss is; alive, a ray of sunshine sufficing for its birth, and for the birth of joy, even in the heart of winter.

And on those days when all other vegetation had disappeared, when the fine jerkins of green leather which covered the trunks of the old trees were hidden beneath the snow; after the snow had ceased to fall, but when the sky was still too much overcast for me to hope that Gilberte would venture out, then suddenly—inspiring my mother to say: "Look, it's quite fine now; I think you might perhaps try going to the Champs-Elysées after all."—On the mantle of snow that swathed the balcony, the sun had appeared and was stitching seams of gold, with embroidered patches of dark shadow. That day we found no one there, or else a solitary girl, on the point of departure, who assured me that Gilberte was not coming. The chairs, deserted by the imposing but uninspiring company of governesses, stood empty. Only, near the grass, was sitting a lady of uncertain age who came in all weathers, dressed always in an identical style, splendid and sombre, to make whose acquaintance I would have, at that period, sacrificed, had it lain in my power, all the greatest opportunities in my life to come. For Gilberte went up every day to speak to her; she used to ask Gilberte for news of her "dearest mother" and it struck me that, if I had known her, I should have been for Gilberte some one wholly different, some one who knew people in her parents' world. While her grandchildren played together at a little distance, she would sit and read the *Débats*, which she called "My old *Débats*!" as, with an aristocratic familiarity, she would say, speaking of the police-sergeant or the woman who let the chairs, "My old friend the police-sergeant," or "The chair-keeper and I, who are old friends."

Françoise found it too cold to stand about, so we walked to the Pont de la Concorde to see the Seine frozen over, on to which everyone, even children, walked fearlessly, as though upon an enormous whale, stranded, defenceless, and about to be cut up. We returned to the Champs-Elysées; I was growing sick with misery between the motionless wooden horses and the white lawn, caught in a net of black paths from which the snow had been cleared, while the statue that surmounted it held in its hand a long pendent icicle which seemed to explain its gesture. The old lady herself, having folded up her *Débats,* asked a passing nursemaid the time, thanking her with "How very good of you!" then begged the road-sweeper to tell her grandchildren to come, as she felt cold, adding "A thousand thanks. I am sorry to give you so much trouble!" Suddenly the sky was rent in two: between the punch-and-judy and the horses, against the opening horizon, I had just seen, like a miraculous sign, Mademoiselle's blue feather. And now Gilberte was running at full speed towards me, sparkling and rosy beneath a cap trimmed with fur, enlivened by the cold, by being late, by her anxiety for a game; shortly before she reached me, she slipped on a piece of ice and, either to regain her balance, or because it appeared to her graceful, or else pretending that she was on skates, it was with outstretched arms that she smilingly advanced, as though to embrace me. "Bravo! bravo! that's splendid; 'topping,' I should say, like you—'sporting,' I suppose I ought to say, only I'm a hundred-and-one, a woman of the old school," exclaimed the lady, uttering, on behalf of the voiceless Champs-Elysées, their thanks to Gilberte for having come, without letting herself be frightened away by the weather. "You are like me, faithful at all costs to our old Champs-Elysées; we are two brave souls! You wouldn't believe me, I dare say, if I told you that I love them, even like this. This snow (I know, you'll laugh at me), it makes me think of ermine!" And the old lady began to laugh herself.

The first of these days—to which the snow, a symbol of the powers that were able to deprive me of the sight of Gilberte, imparted the sadness of a day of separation, almost the aspect of a day of departure, because it changed the outward form and almost forbade the use of the customary scene of our only encounters, now altered, covered, as it were, in dust-sheets—that day, none the less, marked a stage in the progress of my love, for it was, in a sense, the first sorrow that she was to share with me. There were only our two selves of our little company, and to be thus alone with her was not merely like a beginning of intimacy, but also on her part—as though she had come there solely to please me, and in such weather—it seemed to me as touching as if, on one of those days on which she had been invited to a party, she had given it up in order to come to me in the Champs-Elysées; I acquired more confidence in the vitality, in the future of a friendship which could remain so much alive amid the torpor, the solitude, the decay of our surroundings; and while she dropped pellets of snow down my neck, I smiled lovingly at what seemed to me at once a predilection that she shewed for me in thus tolerating me as her travelling companion in this new, this wintry land, and a sort of loyalty to me which she preserved through evil times. Presently, one after another, like shyly hopping sparrows, her friends arrived, black against the snow. We got ready to play and, since this day which had begun so sadly was destined to end in joy, as I went up, before the game started, to the friend with the sharp voice whom I had heard, that first day, calling Gilberte by name, she said to me: "No, no, I'm sure you'd much rather be in Gilberte's camp; besides, look, she's signalling to you." She was in fact summoning me to cross the snowy lawn to her camp, to 'take the field,' which the sun, by casting over it a rosy gleam, the metallic lustre of old and worn brocades, had turned into a Field of the Cloth of Gold.

This day, which I had begun with so many misgivings, was, as it happened, one of the few on which I was not unduly wretched.

For, although I no longer thought, now, of anything save not to let a single day pass without seeing Gilberte (so much so that once, when my grandmother had not come home by dinner-time, I could not resist the instinctive reflection that, if she had been run over in the street and killed, I should not for some time be allowed to play in the Champs-Elysées; when one is in love one has no love left for anyone), yet those moments which I spent in her company, for which I had waited with so much impatience all night and morning, for which I had quivered with excitement, to which I would have sacrificed everything else in the world, were by no means happy moments; well did I know it, for they were the only moments in my life on which I concentrated a scrupulous, undistracted attention, and yet I could not discover in them one atom of pleasure. All the time that I was away from Gilberte, I wanted to see her, because, having incessantly sought to form a mental picture of her, I was unable, in the end, to do so, and did not know exactly to what my love corresponded. Besides, she had never yet told me that she loved me. Far from it, she had often boasted that she knew other little boys whom she preferred to myself, that I was a good companion, with whom she was always willing to play, although I was too absent-minded, not attentive enough to the game. Moreover, she had often shewn signs of apparent coldness towards me, which might have shaken my faith that I was for her a creature different from the rest, had that faith been founded upon a love that Gilberte had felt for me, and not, as was the case, upon the love that I felt for her, which strengthened its resistance to the assaults of doubt by making it depend entirely upon the manner in which I was obliged, by an internal compulsion, to think of Gilberte. But my feelings with regard to her I had never yet ventured to express to her in words. Of course, on every page of my exercise-books, I wrote out, in endless repetition, her name and address, but at the sight of those vague lines which I might trace, without her having to think, on that account, of me, I felt discouraged, because they spoke to me, not of Gilberte, who would never so much as see them, but of my own desire, which they seemed to shew me in its true colours, as something purely personal, unreal, tedious and ineffective. The most important thing was that we should see each other, Gilberte and I, and should have an opportunity of making a mutual confession of our love which, until then, would not officially (so to speak) have begun. Doubtless the various reasons which made me so impatient to see her would have appeared less urgent to a grown man. As life goes on, we acquire such adroitness in the culture of our pleasures, that we content ourselves with that which we derive from thinking of a woman, as I was thinking of Gilberte, without troubling ourselves to ascertain whether the image corresponds to the reality,—and with the pleasure of loving her, without needing to be sure, also, that she loves us; or again that we renounce the pleasure of confessing our passion for her, so as to preserve and enhance the passion that she has for us, like those Japanese gardeners who, to obtain one perfect blossom, will sacrifice the rest. But at the period when I was in love with Gilberte, I still believed that Love did really exist, apart from ourselves; that, allowing us, at the most, to surmount the obstacles in our way, it offered us its blessings in an order in which we were not free to make the least alteration; it seemed to me that if I had, on my own initiative, substituted for the sweetness of a confession a pretence of indifference, I should not only have been depriving myself of one of the joys of which I had most often dreamed, I should have been fabricating, of my own free will, a love that was artificial and without value, that bore no relation to the truth, whose mysterious and foreordained ways I should thus have been declining to follow.

But when I arrived at the Champs-Elysées,—and, as at first sight it appeared, was in a position to confront my love, so as to make it undergo the necessary modifications, with its living and independent cause—as soon as I was in the presence of that Gilberte Swann on the sight of whom I had counted to revive the images that my tired memory had lost and could not find again, of that Gilberte Swann with whom I had been playing the day before, and whom I had just been prompted to greet, and then to recognise, by a blind instinct like that which, when we are walking, sets one foot before the other, without giving us time to think what we are doing, then at once it became as though she and the little girl who had inspired my dreams had been two different people. If, for instance, I had retained in my memory overnight two fiery eyes above plump and rosy cheeks, Gilberte's face would now offer me (and with emphasis) something that I distinctly had not remembered, a certain sharpening and prolongation of the nose which, instantaneously associating itself with certain others of her features, assumed the importance of those characteristics which, in natural history, are used to define a species, and transformed her into a little girl of the kind that have sharpened profiles. While I was making myself ready to take advantage of this long expected moment, and to surrender myself to the impression of Gilberte which I had prepared beforehand but could no longer find in my head, to an extent which would enable me, during the long hours which I must spend alone, to be certain that it was indeed herself whom I had in mind, that it was indeed my love for her that I was gradually making grow, as a book grows when one is writing it, she threw me a ball; and, like the idealist philosopher whose body takes account of the external world in the reality of which his intellect declines to believe, the same self which had made me salute her before I had identified her now urged me to catch the ball that she tossed to me (as though she had been a companion, with whom I had come to play, and not a sister-soul with whom my soul had come to be united), made me, out of politeness, until the time came when she had to go, address a thousand polite and trivial remarks to her, and so prevented me both from keeping a silence in which I might at last have laid my hand upon the indispensable, escaped idea, and from uttering the words which might have made that definite progress in the course of our love on which I was always obliged to count only for the following afternoon. There was, however, an occasional development. One day, we had gone with Gilberte to the stall of our own special vendor, who was always particularly nice to us, since it was to her that M. Swann used to send for his gingerbread, of which, for reasons of health (he suffered from a racial eczema, and from the constipation of the prophets), he consumed a great quantity,—Gilberte pointed out to me with a laugh two little boys who were like the little artist and the little naturalist in the children's storybooks. For one of them would not have a red stick of rock because he preferred the purple, while the other, with tears in his eyes, refused a plum which his nurse was buying for him, because, as he finally explained in passionate tones: "I want the other plum; it's got a worm in it!" I purchased two ha'penny marbles. With admiring eyes I saw, luminous and imprisoned in a bowl by themselves, the agate marbles which seemed precious to me because they were as fair and smiling as little girls, and because they cost fivepence each. Gilberte, who was given a great deal more pocket money than I ever had, asked me which I thought the prettiest. They were as transparent, as liquid-seeming as life itself. I would not have had her sacrifice a single one of them. I should have liked her to be able to buy them, to liberate them all. Still, I pointed out one that had the same colour as her eyes. Gilberte took it, turned it about until it shone with a ray of gold, fondled it, paid its ransom, but at once handed me her captive, saying: "Take it; it is for you, I give it to you, keep it to remind yourself of me."

Another time, being still obsessed by the desire to hear Berma in classic drama, I had asked her whether she had not a copy of a pamphlet in which Bergotte spoke of Racine, and which was now out of print. She had told me to let her know the exact title of it, and that evening I had sent her a little telegram, writing on its envelope the name, Gilberte Swann, which I had so often traced in my exercise-books. Next day she brought me in a parcel tied with pink bows and sealed with white wax, the pamphlet, a copy of which she had managed to find. "You see, it is what you asked me for," she said, taking from her muff the telegram that I had sent her. But in the address on the pneumatic message—which, only yesterday, was nothing, was merely a 'little blue' that I had written, and, after a messenger had delivered it to Gilberte's porter and a servant had taken it to her in her room, had become a thing without value or distinction, one of the 'little blues' that she had received in the course of the day—I had difficulty in recognising the futile, straggling lines of my own handwriting beneath the circles stamped on it at the post-office, the inscriptions added in pencil by a postman, signs of effectual realisation, seals of the external world, violet bands symbolical of life itself, which for the first time came to espouse, to maintain, to raise, to rejoice my dream.

And there was another day on which she said to me: "You know, you may call me 'Gilberte'; in any case, I'm going to call you by your first name. It's too silly not to." Yet she continued for a while to address me by the more formal *'vous,'* and, when I drew her attention to this, smiled, and composing, constructing a phrase like those that are put into the grammar-books of foreign languages with no other object than to teach us to make use of a new word, ended it with my Christian name. And when I recalled, later, what I had felt at the time, I could distinguish the impression of having been held, for a moment, in her mouth, myself, naked, without, any longer, any of the social qualifications which belonged equally to her other companions and, when she used my surname, to my parents, accessories of which her lips—by the effort that she made, a little after her father's manner, to articulate the words to which she wished to give a special value—had the air of stripping, of divesting me, as one peels the skin from a fruit of which one is going to put only the pulp into one's mouth, while her glance, adapting itself to the same new degree of intimacy as her speech, fell on me also more directly, not without testifying to the consciousness, the pleasure, even the gratitude that it felt, accompanying itself with a smile.

But at that actual moment, I was not able to appreciate the worth of these new pleasures. They were given, not by the little girl whom I loved, to me who loved her, but by the other, her with whom I used to play, to my other self, who possessed neither the memory of the true Gilberte, nor the fixed heart which alone could have known the value of a happiness for which it alone had longed. Even after I had returned home I did not taste them, since, every day, the necessity which made me hope that on the morrow I should arrive at the clear, calm, happy contemplation of Gilberte, that she would at last confess her love for me, explaining to me the reasons by which she had been obliged, hitherto, to conceal it, that same necessity forced me to regard the past as of no account, to look ahead of me only, to consider the little advantages that she had given me not in themselves and as if they were self-sufficient, but like fresh rungs of the ladder on which I might set my feet, which were going to allow me to advance a step further and finally to attain the happiness which I had not yet encountered.

If, at times, she shewed me these marks of her affection, she troubled me also by seeming not to be pleased to see me, and this happened often on the very days on which I had most counted for the realisation of my hopes. I was sure that Gilberte was coming to the Champs-Elysées, and I felt an elation which seemed merely the anticipation of a great happiness when—going into the drawing-room in the morning to kiss Mamma, who was already dressed to go out, the coils of her black hair elaborately built up, and her beautiful hands, plump and white, fragrant still with soap—I had been apprised, by seeing a column of dust standing by itself in the air above the piano, and by hearing a barrel-organ playing, beneath the window, *En revenant de la revue,* that the winter had received, until nightfall, an unexpected, radiant visit from a day of spring. While we sat at luncheon, by opening her window, the lady opposite had sent packing, in the twinkling of an eye, from beside my chair—to sweep in a single stride over the whole width of our dining-room—a sunbeam which had lain down there for its midday rest and returned to continue it there a moment later. At school, during the one o'clock lesson, the sun made me sick with impatience and boredom as it let fall a golden stream that crept to the edge of my desk, like an invitation to the feast at which I could not myself arrive before three o'clock, until the moment when Françoise came to fetch me at the school-gate, and we made our way towards the Champs-Elysées through streets decorated with sunlight, dense with people, over which the balconies, detached by the sun and made vaporous, seemed to float in front of the houses like clouds of gold. Alas! in the Champs-Elysées I found no Gilberte; she had not yet arrived. Motionless, on the lawn nurtured by the invisible sun which, here and there, kindled to a flame the point of a blade of grass, while the pigeons that had alighted upon it had the appearance of ancient sculptures which the gardener's pick had heaved to the surface of a hallowed soil, I stood with my eyes fixed on the horizon, expecting at every moment to see appear the form of Gilberte following that of her governess, behind the statue that seemed to be holding out the child, which it had in its arms, and which glistened in the stream of light, to receive benediction from the sun. The old lady who read the *Débats* was sitting on her chair, in her invariable place, and had just accosted a park-keeper, with a friendly wave of her hands towards him as she exclaimed "What a lovely day!" And when the chair-woman came up to collect her penny, with an infinity of smirks and affectations she folded the ticket away inside her glove, as though it had been a posy of flowers, for which she had sought, in gratitude to the donor, the most becoming place upon her person. When she had found it, she performed a circular movement with her neck, straightened her boa, and fastened upon the collector, as she shewed her the end of yellow paper that stuck out over her bare wrist, the bewitching smile with which a woman says to a young man, pointing to her bosom: "You see, I'm wearing your roses!"

I dragged Françoise, on the way towards Gilberte, as far as the Arc de Triomphe; we did not meet her, and I was returning towards the lawn convinced, now, that she was not coming, when, in front of the wooden horses, the little girl with the sharp voice flung herself upon me: "Quick, quick, Gilberte's been here a quarter of an hour. She's just going. We've been waiting for you, to make up a prisoner's base."

While I had been going up the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, Gilberte had arrived by the Rue Boissy-d'Anglas, Mademoiselle having taken advantage of the fine weather to go on some errand of her own; and M. Swann was coming to fetch his daughter. And so it was my fault; I ought not to have strayed from the lawn; for one never knew for certain from what direction Gilberte would appear, whether she would be early or late, and this perpetual tension succeeded in making more impressive not only the Champs-Elysées in their entirety, and the whole span of the afternoon, like a vast expanse of space and time, on every point and at every moment of which it was possible that the form of Gilberte might appear, but also that form itself, since behind its appearance I felt that there lay concealed the reason for which it had shot its arrow into my heart at four o'clock instead of at half-past two; crowned with a smart hat, for paying calls, instead of the plain cap, for games; in front of the Ambassadeurs and not between the two puppet-shows; I divined one of those occupations in which I might not follow Gilberte, occupations that forced her to go out or to stay at home, I was in contact with the mystery of her unknown life. It was this mystery, too, which troubled me when, running at the sharp-voiced girl's bidding, so as to begin our game without more delay, I saw Gilberte, so quick and informal with us, make a ceremonious bow to the old lady with the *Débats* (who acknowledged it with "What a lovely sun! You'd think there was a fire burning.") speaking to her with a shy smile, with an air of constraint which called to my mind the other little girl that Gilberte must be when at home with her parents, or with friends of her parents, paying visits, in all the rest, that escaped me, of her existence. But of that existence no one gave me so strong an impression as did M. Swann, who came a little later to fetch his daughter. That was because he and Mme. Swann—inasmuch as their daughter lived with them, as her lessons, her games, her friendships depended upon them—contained for me, like Gilberte, perhaps even more than Gilberte, as befitted subjects that had an all-powerful control over her in whom it must have had its source, an undefined, an inaccessible quality of melancholy charm. Everything that concerned them was on my part the object of so constant a preoccupation that the days on which, as on this day, M. Swann (whom I had seen so often, long ago, without his having aroused my curiosity, when he was still on good terms with my parents) came for Gilberte to the Champs-Elysées, once the pulsations to which my heart had been excited by the appearance of his grey hat and hooded cape had subsided, the sight of him still impressed me as might that of an historic personage, upon whom one had just been studying a series of books, and the smallest details of whose life one learned with enthusiasm. His relations with the Comte de Paris, which, when I heard them discussed at Combray, seemed to me unimportant, became now in my eyes something marvellous, as if no one else had ever known the House of Orleans; they set him in vivid detachment against the vulgar background of pedestrians of different classes, who encumbered that particular path in the Champs-Elysées, in the midst of whom I admired his condescending to figure without claiming any special deference, which as it happened none of them dreamed of paying him, so profound was the incognito in which he was wrapped.

He responded politely to the salutations of Gilberte's companions, even to mine, for all that he was no longer on good terms with my family, but without appearing to know who I was. (This reminded me that he had constantly seen me in the country; a memory which I had retained, but kept out of sight, because, since I had seen Gilberte again, Swann had become to me pre-eminently her father, and no longer the Combray Swann; as the ideas which, nowadays, I made his name connote were different from the ideas in the system of which it was formerly comprised, which I utilised not at all now when I had occasion to think of him, he had become a new, another person; still I attached him by an artificial thread, secondary and transversal, to our former guest; and as nothing had any longer any value for me save in the extent to which my love might profit by it, it was with a spasm of shame and of regret at not being able to erase them from my memory that I recaptured the years in which, in the eyes of this same Swann who was at this moment before me in the Champs-Elysées, and to whom, fortunately, Gilberte had perhaps not mentioned my name, I had so often, in the evenings, made myself ridiculous by sending to ask Mamma to come upstairs to my room to say good-night to me, while she was drinking coffee with him and my father and my grandparents at the table in the garden.) He told Gilberte that she might play one game; he could wait for a quarter of an hour; and, sitting down, just like anyone else, on an iron chair, paid for his ticket with that hand which Philippe VII had so often held in his own, while we began our game upon the lawn, scattering the pigeons, whose beautiful, iridescent bodies (shaped like hearts and, surely, the lilacs of the feathered kingdom) took refuge as in so many sanctuaries, one on the great basin of stone, on which its beak, as it disappeared below the rim, conferred the part, assigned the purpose of offering to the bird in abundance the fruit or grain at which it appeared to be pecking, another on the head of the statue, which it seemed to crown with one of those enamelled objects whose polychrome varies in certain classical works the monotony of the stone, and with an attribute which, when the goddess bears it, entitles her to a particular epithet and makes of her, as a different Christian name makes of a mortal, a fresh divinity.

On one of these sunny days which had not realised my hopes, I had not the courage to conceal my disappointment from Gilberte.

"I had ever so many things to ask you," I said to her; "I thought that to-day was going to mean so much in our friendship. And no sooner have you come than you go away! Try to come early to-morrow, so that I can talk to you."

Her face lighted up and she jumped for joy as she answered: "To-morrow, you may make up your mind, my dear friend, I sha'n't come! First of all I've a big luncheon-party; then in the afternoon I am going to a friend's house to see King Theodosius arrive from her windows; won't that be splendid?—and then, next day, I'm going to *Michel Strogoff*, and after that it will soon be Christmas, and the New Year holidays! Perhaps they'll take me south, to the Riviera; won't that be nice? Though I should miss the Christmas-tree here; anyhow, if I do stay in Paris, I sha'n't be coming here, because I shall be out paying calls with Mamma. Good-bye—there's Papa calling me."

I returned home with Françoise through streets that were still gay with sunshine, as on the evening of a holiday when the merriment is over. I could scarcely drag my legs along.

"I'm not surprised;" said Françoise, "it's not the right weather for the time of year; it's much too warm. Oh dear, oh dear, to think of all the poor sick people there must be everywhere; you would think that up there, too, everything's got out of order."

I repeated to myself, stifling my sobs, the words in which Gilberte had given utterance to her joy at the prospect of not coming back, for a long time, to the Champs-Elysées. But already the charm with which, by the mere act of thinking, my mind was filled as soon as it thought of her, the privileged position, unique even if it were painful, in which I was inevitably placed in relation to Gilberte by the contraction of a scar in my mind, had begun to add to that very mark of her indifference something romantic, and in the midst of my tears my lips would shape themselves in a smile which was indeed the timid outline of a kiss. And when the time came for the postman I said to myself, that evening as on every other: "I am going to have a letter from Gilberte, she is going to tell me, at last, that she has never ceased to love me, and to explain to me the mysterious reason by which she has been forced to conceal her love from me until now, to put on the appearance of being able to be happy without seeing me; the reason for which she has assumed the form of the other Gilberte, who is simply a companion."

Every evening I would beguile myself into imagining this letter, believing that I was actually reading it, reciting each of its sentences in turn. Suddenly I would stop, in alarm. I had realised that, if I was to receive a letter from Gilberte, it could not, in any case, be this letter, since it was I myself who had just composed it. And from that moment I would strive to keep my thoughts clear of the words which I should have liked her to write to me, from fear lest, by first selecting them myself, I should be excluding just those identical words,—the dearest, the most desired—from the field of possible events. Even if, by an almost impossible coincidence, it had been precisely the letter of my invention that Gilberte had addressed to me of her own accord, recognising my own work in it I should not have had the impression that I was receiving something that had not originated in myself, something real, something new, a happiness external to my mind, independent of my will, a gift indeed from love.

While I waited I read over again a page which, although it had not been written to me by Gilberte, came to me, none the less, from her, that page by Bergotte upon the beauty of the old myths from which Racine drew his inspiration, which (with the agate marble) I always kept within reach. I was touched by my friend's kindness in having procured the book for me; and as everyone is obliged to find some reason for his passion, so much so that he is glad to find in the creature whom he loves qualities which (he has learned by reading or in conversation) are worthy to excite a man's love, that he assimilates them by imitation and makes out of them fresh reasons for his love, even although these qualities be diametrically opposed to those for which his love would have sought, so long as it was spontaneous—as Swann, before my day, had sought to establish the aesthetic basis of Odette's beauty—I, who had at first loved Gilberte, in Combray days, on account of all the unknown element in her life into which I would fain have plunged headlong, have undergone reincarnation, discarding my own separate existence as a thing that no longer mattered, I thought now, as of an inestimable advantage, that of this, my own, my too familiar, my contemptible existence Gilberte might one day become the humble servant, the kindly, the comforting collaborator, who in the evenings, helping me in my work, would collate for me the texts of rare pamphlets. As for Bergotte, that infinitely wise, almost divine old man, because of whom I had first, before I had even seen her, loved Gilberte, now it was for Gilberte's sake, chiefly, that I loved him. With as much pleasure as the pages that he had written about Racine, I studied the wrapper, folded under great seals of white wax and tied with billows of pink ribbon, in which she had brought those pages to me. I kissed the agate marble, which was the better part of my love's heart, the part that was not frivolous but faithful, and, for all that it was adorned with the mysterious charm of Gilberte's life, dwelt close beside me, inhabited my chamber, shared my bed. But the beauty of that stone, and the beauty also of those pages of Bergotte which I was glad to associate with the idea of my love for Gilberte, as if, in the moments when my love seemed no longer to have any existence, they gave it a kind of consistency, were, I perceived, anterior to that love, which they in no way resembled; their elements had been determined by the writer's talent, or by geological laws, before ever Gilberte had known me, nothing in book or stone would have been different if Gilberte had not loved me, and there was nothing, consequently, that authorised me to read in them a message of happiness. And while my love, incessantly waiting for the morrow to bring a confession of Gilberte's love for me, destroyed, unravelled every evening, the ill-done work of the day, in some shadowed part of my being was an unknown weaver who would not leave where they lay the severed threads, but collected and rearranged them, without any thought of pleasing me, or of toiling for my advantage, in the different order which she gave to all her handiwork. Without any special interest in my love, not beginning by deciding that I was loved, she placed, side by side, those of Gilberte's actions that had seemed to me inexplicable and her faults which I had excused. Then, one with another, they took on a meaning. It seemed to tell me, this new arrangement, that when I saw Gilberte, instead of coming to me in the Champs-Elysées, going to a party, or on errands with her governess, when I saw her prepared for an absence that would extend over the New Year holidays, I was wrong in thinking, in saying: "It is because she is frivolous," or "easily lead." For she would have ceased to be either if she had loved me, and if she had been forced to obey it would have been with the same despair in her heart that I felt on the days when I did not see her. It shewed me further, this new arrangement, that I ought, after all, to know what it was to love, since I loved Gilberte; it drew my attention to the constant anxiety that I had to 'shew off' before her, by reason of which I tried to persuade my mother to get for Françoise a waterproof coat and a hat with a blue feather, or, better still, to stop sending with me to the Champs-Elysées an attendant with whom I blushed to be seen (to all of which my mother replied that I was not fair to Françoise, that she was an excellent woman and devoted to us all) and also that sole, exclusive need to see Gilberte, the result of which was that, months in advance, I could think of nothing but how to find out at what date she would be leaving Paris and where she was going, feeling that the most attractive country in the world would be but a place of exile if she were not to be there, and asking only to be allowed to stay for ever in Paris, so long as I might see her in the Champs-Elysées; and it had little difficulty in making me see that neither my anxiety nor my need could be justified by anything in Gilberte's conduct. She, on the contrary, was genuinely fond of her governess, without troubling herself over what I might choose to think about it. It seemed quite natural to her not to come to the Champs-Elysées if she had to go shopping with Mademoiselle, delightful if she had to go out somewhere with her mother. And even supposing that she would ever have allowed me to spend my holidays in the same place as herself, when it came to choosing that place she considered her parents' wishes, a thousand different amusements of which she had been told, and not at all that it should be the place to which my family were proposing to send me. When she assured me (as sometimes happened) that she liked me less than some other of her friends, less than she had liked me the day before, because by my clumsiness I had made her side lose a game, I would beg her pardon, I would beg her to tell me what I must do in order that she should begin again to like me as much as, or more than the rest; I hoped to hear her say that that was already my position; I besought her; as though she had been able to modify her affection for me as she or I chose, to give me pleasure, merely by the words that she would utter, as my good or bad conduct should deserve. Was I, then, not yet aware that what I felt, myself, for her, depended neither upon her actions nor upon my desires?

It shewed me finally, the new arrangement planned by my unseen weaver, that, if we find ourselves hoping that the actions of a person who has hitherto caused us anxiety may prove not to have been sincere, they shed in their wake a light which our hopes are powerless to extinguish, a light to which, rather than to our hopes, we must put the question, what will be that person's actions on the morrow.

These new counsels, my love listened and heard them; they persuaded it that the morrow would not be different from all the days that had gone before; that Gilberte's feeling for me, too long established now to be capable of alteration, was indifference; that in my friendship with Gilberte, it was I alone who loved. "That is true," my love responded, "there is nothing more to be made of that friendship. It will not alter now." And so the very next day (unless I were to wait for a public holiday, if there was one approaching, some anniversary, the New Year, perhaps, one of those days which are not like other days, on which time starts afresh, casting aside the heritage of the past, declining its legacy of sorrows) I would appeal to Gilberte to terminate our old and to join me in laying the foundations of a new friendship.

⁂

I had always, within reach, a plan of Paris, which, because I could see drawn on it the street in which M. and Mme. Swann lived, seemed to me to contain a secret treasure. And to please myself, as well as by a sort of chivalrous loyalty, in any connection or with no relevance at all, I would repeat the name of that street until my father, not being, like my mother and grandmother, in the secret of my love, would ask: "But why are you always talking about that street? There's nothing wonderful about it. It is an admirable street to live in because it's only a few minutes' walk from the Bois, but there are a dozen other streets just the same."

I made every effort to introduce the name of Swann into my conversation with my parents; in my own mind, of course, I never ceased to murmur it; but I needed also to hear its exquisite sound, and to make myself play that chord, the voiceless rendering of which did not suffice me. Moreover, that name of Swann, with which I had for so long been familiar, was to me now (as happens at times to people suffering from aphasia, in the case of the most ordinary words) the name of something new. It was for ever present in my mind, which could not, however, grow accustomed to it. I analysed it, I spelt it; its orthography came to me as a surprise. And with its familiarity it had simultaneously lost its innocence. The pleasure that I derived from the sound of it I felt to be so guilty, that it seemed to me as though the others must read my thoughts, and would change the conversation if I endeavoured to guide it in that direction. I fell back upon subjects which still brought me into touch with Gilberte, I eternally repeated the same words, and it was no use my knowing that they were but words—words uttered in her absence, which she could not hear, words without virtue in themselves, repeating what were, indeed, facts, but powerless to modify them—for still it seemed to me that by dint of handling, of stirring in this way everything that had reference to Gilberte, I might perhaps make emerge from it something that would bring me happiness. I told my parents again that Gilberte was very fond of her governess, as if the statement, when repeated for the hundredth time, would at last have the effect of making Gilberte suddenly burst into the room, come to live with us for ever. I had already sung the praises of the old lady who read the *Débats* (I had hinted to my parents that she must at least be an Ambassador's widow, if not actually a Highness) and I continued to descant on her beauty, her splendour, her nobility, until the day on which I mentioned that, by what I had heard Gilberte call her, she appeared to be a Mme. Blatin.

"Oh, now I know whom you mean," cried my mother, while I felt myself grow red all over with shame. "On guard! on guard!—as your grandfather says. And so it's she that you think so wonderful? Why, she's perfectly horrible, and always has been. She's the widow of a bailiff. You can't remember, when you were little, all the trouble I used to have to avoid her at your gymnastic lessons, where she was always trying to get hold of me—I didn't know the woman, of course—to tell me that you were 'much too nice-looking for a boy.' She has always had an insane desire to get to know people, and she must be quite insane, as I have always thought, if she really does know Mme. Swann. For even if she does come of very common people, I have never heard anything said against her character. But she must always be forcing herself upon strangers. She is, really, a horrible woman, frightfully vulgar, and besides, she is always creating awkward situations."

As for Swann, in my attempts to resemble him, I spent the whole time, when I was at table, in drawing my finger along my nose and in rubbing my eyes. My father would exclaim: "The child's a perfect idiot, he's becoming quite impossible." More than all else I should have liked to be as bald as Swann. He appeared to me to be a creature so extraordinary that I found it impossible to believe that people whom I knew and often saw knew him also, and that in the course of the day anyone might run against him. And once my mother, while she was telling us, as she did every evening at dinner, where she had been and what she had done that afternoon, merely by the words: "By the way, guess whom I saw at the Trois Quartiers—at the umbrella counter—Swann!" caused to burst open in the midst of her narrative (an arid desert to me) a mystic blossom. What a melancholy satisfaction to learn that, that very afternoon, threading through the crowd his supernatural form, Swann had gone to buy an umbrella. Among the events of the day, great and small, but all equally unimportant, that one alone aroused in me those peculiar vibrations by which my love for Gilberte was invariably stirred. My father complained that I took no interest in anything, because I did not listen while he was speaking of the political developments that might follow the visit of King Theodosius, at that moment in France as the nation's guest and (it was hinted) ally. And yet how intensely interested I was to know whether Swann had been wearing his hooded cape!

"Did you speak to him?" I asked.

"Why, of course I did," answered my mother, who always seemed afraid lest, were she to admit that we were not on the warmest of terms with Swann, people would seek to reconcile us more than she cared for, in view of the existence of Mme. Swann, whom she did not wish to know. "It was he who came up and spoke to me. I hadn't seen him."

"Then you haven't quarrelled?"

"Quarrelled? What on earth made you think that we had quarrelled?" she briskly parried, as though I had cast doubt on the fiction of her friendly relations with Swann, and was planning an attempt to 'bring them together.'

"He might be cross with you for never asking him here."

"One isn't obliged to ask everyone to one's house, you know; has he ever asked me to his? I don't know his wife."

"But he used often to come, at Combray."

"I should think he did! He used to come at Combray, and now, in Paris, he has something better to do, and so have I. But I can promise you, we didn't look in the least like people who had quarrelled. We were kept waiting there for some time, while they brought him his parcel. He asked after you; he told me you had been playing with his daughter—" my mother went on, amazing me with the portentous revelation of my own existence in Swann's mind; far more than that, of my existence in so complete, so material a form that when I stood before him, trembling with love, in the Champs-Elysées, he had known my name, and who my mother was, and had been able to blend with my quality as his daughter's playmate certain facts with regard to my grandparents and their connections, the place in which we lived, certain details of our past life, all of which I myself perhaps did not know. But my mother did not seem to have noticed anything particularly attractive in that counter at the Trois Quartiers where she had represented to Swann, at the moment in which he caught sight of her, a definite person with whom he had sufficient memories in common to impel him to come up to her and to speak.

Nor did either she or my father seem to find any occasion now to mention Swann's family, the grandparents of Gilberte, nor to use the title of stockbroker, topics than which nothing else gave me so keen a pleasure. My imagination had isolated and consecrated in the social Paris a certain family, just as it had set apart in the structural Paris a certain house, on whose porch it had fashioned sculptures and made its windows precious. But these ornaments I alone had eyes to see. Just as my father and mother looked upon the house in which Swann lived as one that closely resembled the other houses built at the same period in the neighbourhood of the Bois, so Swann's family seemed to them to be in the same category as many other families of stockbrokers. Their judgment was more or less favourable according to the extent to which the family in question shared in merits that were common to the rest of the universe, and there was about it nothing that they could call unique. What, on the other hand, they did appreciate in the Swanns they found in equal, if not in greater measure elsewhere. And so, after admitting that the house was in a good position, they would go on to speak of some other house that was in a better, but had nothing to do with Gilberte, or of financiers on a larger scale than her grandfather had been; and if they had appeared, for a moment, to be of my opinion, that was a mistake which was very soon corrected. For in order to distinguish in all Gilberte's surroundings an indefinable quality analogous, in the scale of emotions, to what in the scale of colours is called infra-red, a supplementary sense of perception was required, with which love, for the time being, had endowed me; and this my parents lacked.

On the days when Gilberte had warned me that she would not be coming to the Champs-Elysées, I would try to arrange my walks so that I should be brought into some kind of contact with her. Sometimes I would lead Françoise on a pilgrimage to the house in which the Swanns lived, making her repeat to me unendingly all that she had learned from the governess with regard to Mme. Swann. "It seems, she puts great faith in medals. She would never think of starting on a journey if she had heard an owl hoot, or the death-watch in the wall, or if she had seen a cat at midnight, or if the furniture had creaked. Oh yes! she's a most religious lady, she is!" I was so madly in love with Gilberte that if, on our way, I caught sight of their old butler taking the dog out, my emotion would bring me to a standstill, I would fasten on his white whiskers eyes that melted with passion. And Françoise would rouse me with: "What's wrong with you now, child?" and we would continue on our way until we reached their gate, where a porter, different from every other porter in the world, and saturated, even to the braid on his livery, with the same melancholy charm that I had felt to be latent in the name of Gilberte, looked at me as though he knew that I was one of those whose natural unworthiness would for ever prevent them from penetrating into the mysteries of the life inside, which it was his duty to guard, and over which the ground-floor windows appeared conscious of being protectingly closed, with far less resemblance, between the nobly sweeping arches of their muslin curtains, to any other windows in the world than to Gilberte's glancing eyes. On other days we would go along the boulevards, and I would post myself at the corner of the Rue Duphot; I had heard that Swann was often to be seen passing there, on his way to the dentist's; and my imagination so far differentiated Gilberte's father from the rest of humanity, his presence in the midst of a crowd of real people introduced among them so miraculous an element, that even before we reached the Madeleine I would be trembling with emotion at the thought that I was approaching a street from which that supernatural apparition might at any moment burst upon me unawares.

But most often of all, on days when I was not to see Gilberte, as I had heard that Mme. Swann walked almost every day along the Allée des Acacias, round the big lake, and in the Allée de la Reine Marguerite, I would guide Françoise in the direction of the Bois de Boulogne. It was to me like one of those zoological gardens in which one sees assembled together a variety of flora, and contrasted effects in landscape; where from a hill one passes to a grotto, a meadow, rocks, a stream, a trench, another hill, a marsh, but knows that they are there only to enable the hippopotamus, zebra, crocodile, rabbit, bear and heron to disport themselves in a natural or a picturesque setting; this, the Bois, equally complex, uniting a multitude of little worlds, distinct and separate—placing a stage set with red trees, American oaks, like an experimental forest in Virginia, next to a fir-wood by the edge of the lake, or to a forest grove from which would suddenly emerge, in her lissom covering of furs, with the large, appealing eyes of a dumb animal, a hastening walker—was the Garden of Woman; and like the myrtle-alley in the Aeneid, planted for their delight with trees of one kind only, the Allée des Acacias was thronged by the famous Beauties of the day. As, from a long way off, the sight of the jutting crag from which it dives into the pool thrills with joy the children who know that they are going to behold the seal, long before I reached the acacia-alley, their fragrance, scattered abroad, would make me feel that I was approaching the incomparable presence of a vegetable personality, strong and tender; then, as I drew near, the sight of their topmost branches, their lightly tossing foliage, in its easy grace, its coquettish outline, its delicate fabric, over which hundreds of flowers were laid, like winged and throbbing colonies of precious insects; and finally their name itself, feminine, indolent and seductive, made my heart beat, but with a social longing, like those waltzes which remind us only of the names of the fair dancers, called aloud as they entered the ball-room. I had been told that I should see in the alley certain women of fashion, who, in spite of their not all having husbands, were constantly mentioned in conjunction with Mme. Swann, but most often by their professional names;—their new names, when they had any, being but a sort of incognito, a veil which those who would speak of them were careful to draw aside, so as to make themselves understood. Thinking that Beauty—in the order of feminine elegance—was governed by occult laws into the knowledge of which they had been initiated, and that they had the power to realise it, I accepted before seeing them, like the truth of a coming revelation, the appearance of their clothes, of their carriages and horses, of a thousand details among which I placed my faith as in an inner soul which gave the cohesion of a work of art to that ephemeral and changing pageant. But it was Mme. Swann whom I wished to see, and I waited for her to go past, as deeply moved as though she were Gilberte, whose parents, saturated, like everything in her environment, with her own special charm, excited in me as keen a passion as she did herself, indeed a still more painful disturbance (since their point of contact with her was that intimate, that internal part of her life which was hidden from me), and furthermore, for I very soon learned, as we shall see in due course, that they did not like my playing with her, that feeling of veneration which we always have for those who hold, and exercise without restraint, the power to do us an injury.

I assigned the first place, in the order of aesthetic merit and of social grandeur, to simplicity, when I saw Mme. Swann on foot, in a 'polonaise' of plain cloth, a little toque on her head trimmed with a pheasant's wing, a bunch of violets in her bosom, hastening along the Allée des Acacias as if it had been merely the shortest way back to her own house, and acknowledging with a rapid glance the courtesy of the gentlemen in carriages, who, recognising her figure at a distance, were raising their hats to her and saying to one another that there was never anyone so well turned out as she. But instead of simplicity it was to ostentation that I must assign the first place if, after I had compelled Françoise, who could hold out no longer, and complained that her legs were 'giving' beneath her, to stroll up and down with me for another hour, I saw at length, emerging from the Porte Dauphine, figuring for me a royal dignity, the passage of a sovereign, an impression such as no real Queen has ever since been able to give me, because my notion of their power has been less vague, and more founded upon experience—borne along by the flight of a pair of fiery horses, slender and shapely as one sees them in the drawings of Constantin Guys, carrying on its box an enormous coachman, furred like a cossack, and by his side a diminutive groom, like Toby, "the late Beaudenord's tiger," I saw—or rather I felt its outlines engraved upon my heart by a clean and killing stab—a matchless victoria, built rather high, and hinting, through the extreme modernity of its appointments, at the forms of an earlier day, deep down in which lay negligently back Mme. Swann, her hair, now quite pale with one grey lock, girt with a narrow band of flowers, usually violets, from which floated down long veils, a lilac parasol in her hand, on her lips an ambiguous smile in which I read only the benign condescension of Majesty, though it was pre-eminently the enticing smile of the courtesan, which she graciously bestowed upon the men who bowed to her. That smile was, in reality, saying to one: "Oh yes, I do remember, quite well; it was wonderful!" to another: "How I should have loved to! We were unfortunate!", to a third: "Yes, if you like! I must just keep in the line for a minute, then as soon as I can I will break away." When strangers passed she still allowed to linger about her lips a lazy smile, as though she expected or remembered some friend, which made them say: "What a lovely woman!". And for certain men only she had a sour, strained, shy, cold smile which meant: "Yes, you old goat, I know that you've got a tongue like a viper, that you can't keep quiet for a moment. But do you suppose that I care what you say?" Coquelin passed, talking, in a group of listening friends, and with a sweeping wave of his hand bade a theatrical good day to the people in the carriages. But I thought only of Mme. Swann, and pretended to have not yet seen her, for I knew that, when she reached the pigeon-shooting ground, she would tell her coachman to 'break away' and to stop the carriage, so that she might come back on foot. And on days when I felt that I had the courage to pass close by her I would drag Françoise off in that direction; until the moment came when I saw Mme. Swann, letting trail behind her the long train of her lilac skirt, dressed, as the populace imagine queens to be dressed, in rich attire such as no other woman might wear, lowering her eyes now and then to study the handle of her parasol, paying scant attention to the passers-by, as though the important thing for her, her one object in being there, was to take exercise, without thinking that she was seen, and that every head was turned towards her. Sometimes, however, when she had looked back to call her dog to her, she would cast, almost imperceptibly, a sweeping glance round about.

Those even who did not know her were warned by something exceptional, something beyond the normal in her—or perhaps by a telepathic suggestion such as would move an ignorant audience to a frenzy of applause when Berma was 'sublime'—that she must be some one well-known. They would ask one another, "Who is she?", or sometimes would interrogate a passing stranger, or would make a mental note of how she was dressed so as to fix her identity, later, in the mind of a friend better informed than themselves, who would at once enlighten them. Another pair, half-stopping in their walk, would exchange:

"You know who that is? Mme. Swann! That conveys nothing to you? Odette de Crécy, then?"

"Odette de Crécy! Why, I thought as much. Those great, sad eyes . . . But I say, you know, she can't be as young as she was once, eh? I remember, I had her on the day that MacMahon went."

"I shouldn't remind her of it, if I were you. She is now Mme. Swann, the wife of a gentleman in the Jockey Club, a friend of the Prince of Wales. Apart from that, though, she is wonderful still."

"Oh, but you ought to have known her then; Gad, she was lovely! She lived in a very odd little house with a lot of Chinese stuff. I remember, we were bothered all the time by the newsboys, shouting outside; in the end she made me get up and go."

Without listening to these memories, I could feel all about her the indistinct murmur of fame. My heart leaped with impatience when I thought that a few seconds must still elapse before all these people, among whom I was dismayed not to find a certain mulatto banker who (or so I felt) had a contempt for me, were to see the unknown youth, to whom they had not, so far, been paying the slightest attention, salute (without knowing her, it was true, but I thought that I had sufficient authority since my parents knew her husband and I was her daughter's playmate) this woman whose reputation for beauty, for misconduct, and for elegance was universal. But I was now close to Mme. Swann; I pulled off my hat with so lavish, so prolonged a gesture that she could not repress a smile. People laughed. As for her, she had never seen me with Gilberte, she did not know my name, but I was for her—like one of the keepers in the Bois, like the boatman, or the ducks on the lake, to which she threw scraps of bread—one of the minor personages, familiar, nameless, as devoid of individual character as a stage-hand in a theatre, of her daily walks abroad.

On certain days when I had missed her in the Allée des Acacias I would be so fortunate as to meet her in the Allée de la Reine Marguerite, where women went who wished to be alone, or to appear to be wishing to be alone; she would not be alone for long, being soon overtaken by some man or other, often in a grey 'tile' hat, whom I did not know, and who would talk to her for some time, while their two carriages crawled behind.

⁂

That sense of the complexity of the Bois de Boulogne which made it an artificial place and, in the zoological or mythological sense of the word, a Garden, I captured again, this year, as I crossed it on my way to Trianon, on one of those mornings, early in November, when in Paris, if we stay indoors, being so near and yet prevented from witnessing the transformation scene of autumn, which is drawing so rapidly to a close without our assistance, we feel a regret for the fallen leaves that becomes a fever, and may even keep us awake at night. Into my closed room they had been drifting already for a month, summoned there by my desire to see them, slipping between my thoughts and the object, whatever it might be, upon which I was trying to concentrate them, whirling in front of me like those brown spots that sometimes, whatever we may be looking at, will seem to be dancing or swimming before our eyes. And on that morning, not hearing the splash of the rain as on the previous days, seeing the smile of fine weather at the corners of my drawn curtains, as from the corners of closed lips may escape the secret of their happiness, I had felt that I could actually see those yellow leaves, with the light shining through them, in their supreme beauty; and being no more able to restrain myself from going to look at the trees than, in my childhood's days, when the wind howled in the chimney, I had been able to resist the longing to visit the sea, I had risen and left the house to go to Trianon, passing through the Bois de Boulogne. It was the hour and the season in which the Bois seems, perhaps, most multiform, not only because it is then most divided, but because it is divided in a different way. Even in the unwooded parts, where the horizon is large, here and there against the background of a dark and distant mass of trees, now leafless or still keeping their summer foliage unchanged, a double row of orange-red chestnuts seemed, as in a picture just begun, to be the only thing painted, so far, by an artist who had not yet laid any colour on the rest, and to be offering their cloister, in full daylight, for the casual exercise of the human figures that would be added to the picture later on.

Farther off, at a place where the trees were still all green, one alone, small, stunted, lopped, but stubborn in its resistance, was tossing in the breeze an ugly mane of red. Elsewhere, again, might be seen the first awakening of this Maytime of the leaves, and those of an ampelopsis, a smiling miracle, like a red hawthorn flowering in winter, had that very morning all 'come out,' so to speak, in blossom. And the Bois had the temporary, unfinished, artificial look of a nursery garden or a park in which, either for some botanic purpose or in preparation for a festival, there have been embedded among the trees of commoner growth, which have not yet been uprooted and transplanted elsewhere, a few rare specimens, with fantastic foliage, which seem to be clearing all round themselves an empty space, making room, giving air, diffusing light. Thus it was the time of year at which the Bois de Boulogne displays more separate characteristics, assembles more distinct elements in a composite whole than at any other. It was also the time of day. In places where the trees still kept their leaves, they seemed to have undergone an alteration of their substance from the point at which they were touched by the sun's light, still, at this hour in the morning, almost horizontal, as it would be again, a few hours later, at the moment when, just as dusk began, it would flame up like a lamp, project afar over the leaves a warm and artificial glow, and set ablaze the few topmost boughs of a tree that would itself remain unchanged, a sombre incombustible candelabrum beneath its flaming crest. At one spot the light grew solid as a brick wall, and like a piece of yellow Persian masonry, patterned in blue, daubed coarsely upon the sky the leaves of the chestnuts; at another, it cut them off from the sky towards which they stretched out their curling, golden fingers. Half-way up the trunk of a tree draped with wild vine, the light had grafted and brought to blossom, too dazzling to be clearly distinguished, an enormous posy, of red flowers apparently, perhaps of a new variety of carnation. The different parts of the Bois, so easily confounded in summer in the density and monotony of their universal green, were now clearly divided. A patch of brightness indicated the approach to almost every one of them, or else a splendid mass of foliage stood out before it like an oriflamme. I could make out, as on a coloured map, Armenonville, the Pré Catalan, Madrid, the Race Course and the shore of the lake. Here and there would appear some meaningless erection, a sham grotto, a mill, for which the trees made room by drawing away from it, or which was borne upon the soft green platform of a grassy lawn. I could feel that the Bois was not really a wood, that it existed for a purpose alien to the life of its trees; my sense of exaltation was due not only to admiration of the autumn tints but to a bodily desire. Ample source of a joy which the heart feels at first without being conscious of its cause, without understanding that it results from no external impulse! Thus I gazed at the trees with an unsatisfied longing which went beyond them and, without my knowledge, directed itself towards that masterpiece of beautiful strolling women which the trees enframed for a few hours every day. I walked towards the Allée des Acacias. I passed through forest groves in which the morning light, breaking them into new sections, lopped and trimmed the trees, united different trunks in marriage, made nosegays of their branches. It would skilfully draw towards it a pair of trees; making deft use of the sharp chisel of light and shade, it would cut away from each of them half of its trunk and branches, and, weaving together the two halves that remained, would make of them either a single pillar of shade, defined by the surrounding light, or a single luminous phantom whose artificial, quivering contour was encompassed in a network of inky shadows. When a ray of sunshine gilded the highest branches, they seemed, soaked and still dripping with a sparkling moisture, to have emerged alone from the liquid, emerald-green atmosphere in which the whole grove was plunged as though beneath the sea. For the trees continued to live by their own vitality, and when they had no longer any leaves, that vitality gleamed more brightly still from the nap of green velvet that carpeted their trunks, or in the white enamel of the globes of mistletoe that were scattered all the way up to the topmost branches of the poplars, rounded as are the sun and moon in Michelangelo's 'Creation.' But, forced for so many years now, by a sort of grafting process, to share the life of feminine humanity, they called to my mind the figure of the dryad, the fair worldling, swiftly walking, brightly coloured, whom they sheltered with their branches as she passed beneath them, and obliged to acknowledge, as they themselves acknowledged, the power of the season; they recalled to me the happy days when I was young and had faith, when I would hasten eagerly to the spots where masterpieces of female elegance would be incarnate for a few moments beneath the unconscious, accommodating boughs. But the beauty for which the firs and acacias of the Bois de Boulogne made me long, more disquieting in that respect than the chestnuts and lilacs of Trianon which I was going to see, was not fixed somewhere outside myself in the relics of an historical period, in works of art, in a little temple of love at whose door was piled an oblation of autumn leaves ribbed with gold. I reached the shore of the lake; I walked on as far as the pigeon-shooting ground. The idea of perfection which I had within me I had bestowed, in that other time, upon the height of a victoria, upon the raking thinness of those horses, frenzied and light as wasps upon the wing, with bloodshot eyes like the cruel steeds of Diomed, which now, smitten by a desire to see again what I had once loved, as ardent as the desire that had driven me, many years before, along the same paths, I wished to see renewed before my eyes at the moment when Mme. Swann's enormous coachman, supervised by a groom no bigger than his fist, and as infantile as Saint George in the picture, endeavoured to curb the ardour of the flying, steel-tipped pinions with which they thundered along the ground. Alas! there was nothing now but motor-cars driven each by a moustached mechanic, with a tall footman towering by his side. I wished to hold before my bodily eyes, that I might know whether they were indeed as charming as they appeared to the eyes of memory, little hats, so low-crowned as to seem no more than garlands about the brows of women. All the hats now were immense, covered with fruits and flowers and all manner of birds. In place of the lovely gowns in which Mme. Swann walked like a Queen, appeared Greco-Saxon tunics, with Tanagra folds, or sometimes, in the Directoire style, 'Liberty chiffons' sprinkled with flowers like sheets of wallpaper.

On the heads of the gentlemen who might have been eligible to stroll with Mme. Swann in the Allée de la Reine Marguerite, I found not the grey 'tile' hats of old, nor any other kind. They walked the Bois bare-headed. And seeing all these new elements of the spectacle, I had no longer the faith which, applied to them, would have given them consistency, unity, life; they passed in a scattered sequence before me, at random, without reality, containing in themselves no beauty that my eyes might have endeavoured, as in the old days, to extract from them and to compose in a picture. They were just women, in whose elegance I had no belief, and whose clothes seemed to me unimportant. But when a belief vanishes, there survives it—more and more ardently, so as to cloak the absence of the power, now lost to us, of imparting reality to new phenomena—an idolatrous attachment to the old things which our belief in them did once animate, as if it was in that belief and not in ourselves that the divine spark resided, and as if our present incredulity had a contingent cause—the death of the gods.

"Oh, horrible!" I exclaimed to myself: "Does anyone really imagine that these motor-cars are as smart as the old carriage-and-pair? I dare say, I am too old now—but I was not intended for a world in which women shackle themselves in garments that are not even made of cloth. To what purpose shall I walk among these trees if there is nothing left now of the assembly that used to meet beneath the delicate tracery of reddening leaves, if vulgarity and fatuity have supplanted the exquisite thing that once their branches framed? Oh, horrible! My consolation is to think of the women whom I have known, in the past, now that there is no standard left of elegance. But how can the people who watch these dreadful creatures hobble by, beneath hats on which have been heaped the spoils of aviary or garden-bed,—how can they imagine the charm that there was in the sight of Mme. Swann, crowned with a close-fitting lilac bonnet, or with a tiny hat from which rose stiffly above her head a single iris?" Could I ever have made them understand the emotion that I used to feel on winter mornings, when I met Mme. Swann on foot, in an otter-skin coat, with a woollen cap from which stuck out two blade-like partridge-feathers, but enveloped also in the deliberate, artificial warmth of her own house, which was suggested by nothing more than the bunch of violets crushed into her bosom, whose flowering, vivid and blue against the grey sky, the freezing air, the naked boughs, had the same charming effect of using the season and the weather merely as a setting, and of living actually in a human atmosphere, in the atmosphere of this woman, as had in the vases and beaupots of her drawing-room, beside the blazing fire, in front of the silk-covered sofa, the flowers that looked out through closed windows at the falling snow? But it would not have sufficed me that the costumes alone should still have been the same as in those distant years. Because of the solidarity that binds together the different parts of a general impression, parts that our memory keeps in a balanced whole, of which we are not permitted to subtract or to decline any fraction, I should have liked to be able to pass the rest of the day with one of those women, over a cup of tea, in a little house with dark-painted walls (as Mme. Swann's were still in the year after that in which the first part of this story ends) against which would glow the orange flame, the red combustion, the pink and white flickering of her chrysanthemums in the twilight of a November evening, in moments similar to those in which (as we shall see) I had not managed to discover the pleasures for which I longed. But now, albeit they had led to nothing, those moments struck me as having been charming enough in themselves. I sought to find them again as I remembered them. Alas! there was nothing now but flats decorated in the Louis XVI style, all white paint, with hortensias in blue enamel. Moreover, people did not return to Paris, now, until much later. Mme. Swann would have written to me, from a country house, that she would not be in town before February, had I asked her to reconstruct for me the elements of that memory which I felt to belong to a distant era, to a date in time towards which it was forbidden me to ascend again the fatal slope, the elements of that longing which had become, itself, as inaccessible as the pleasure that it had once vainly pursued. And I should have required also that they be the same women, those whose costume interested me because, at a time when I still had faith, my imagination had individualised them and had provided each of them with a legend. Alas! in the acacia-avenue—the myrtle-alley—I did see some of them again, grown old, no more now than grim spectres of what once they had been, wandering to and fro, in desperate search of heaven knew what, through the Virgilian groves. They had long fled, and still I stood vainly questioning the deserted paths. The sun's face was hidden. Nature began again to reign over the Bois, from which had vanished all trace of the idea that it was the Elysian Garden of Woman; above the gimcrack windmill the real sky was grey; the wind wrinkled the surface of the Grand Lac in little wavelets, like a real lake; large birds passed swiftly over the Bois, as over a real wood, and with shrill cries perched, one after another, on the great oaks which, beneath their Druidical crown, and with Dodonaic majesty, seemed to proclaim the unpeopled vacancy of this estranged forest, and helped me to understand how paradoxical it is to seek in reality for the pictures that are stored in one's memory, which must inevitably lose the charm that comes to them from memory itself and from their not being apprehended by the senses. The reality that I had known no longer existed. It sufficed that Mme. Swann did not appear, in the same attire and at the same moment, for the whole avenue to be altered. The places that we have known belong now only to the little world of space on which we map them for our own convenience. None of them was ever more than a thin slice, held between the contiguous impressions that composed our life at that time; remembrance of a particular form is but regret for a particular moment; and houses, roads, avenues are as fugitive, alas, as the years.

Within a Budding Grove

CONTENTS

Part I

PAGE

MADAME SWANN AT HOME *A break in the narrative: old friends in new aspects—The Marquis de Norpois—Bergotte—How I cease for the time being to see Gilberte: a general outline of the sorrow caused by a parting and of the irregular process of oblivion.* 331

PLACE-NAMES: THE PLACE *My first visit to Balbec—First impressions of M. de Charlus and of Robert de Saint-Loup—Dinner with Bloch and his family.* 488

Part II

PLACE-NAMES: THE PLACE (CONTINUED) *First impressions of M. de Charlus and of Robert de Saint-Loup—Dinner with Bloch and his family.* 534

SEASCAPE, WITH FRIEZE OF GIRLS *Dinners at Rivebelle—Enter Albertine.* 595

TRANSLATOR'S DEDICATION

To

K. S. S.

THAT men in armour may be born
  With serpents' teeth the field is sown;
Rains mould, winds bend, suns gild the corn
  Too quickly ripe, too early mown.

I scan the quivering heads, behold
  The features, catch the whispered breath
Of friends long garnered in the cold
  Unopening granaries of death,

Whose names in solemn cadence ring
  Across my slow oblivious page.
Their friendship was a finer thing
  Than fame, or wealth, or honoured age,

And—while you live and I—shall last
  Its tale of seasons with us yet
Who cherish, in the undying past,
  The men we never can forget.

Bad Kissingen,
July 31, 1923.

C. K. S. M.

Within a Budding Grove

PART I

MADAME SWANN AT HOME

My mother, when it was a question of our having M. de Norpois to dinner for the first time, having expressed her regret that Professor Cottard was away from home, and that she herself had quite ceased to see anything of Swann, since either of these might have helped to entertain the old Ambassador, my father replied that so eminent a guest, so distinguished a man of science as Cottard could never be out of place at a dinner-table, but that Swann, with his ostentation, his habit of crying aloud from the housetops the name of everyone that he knew, however slightly, was an impossible vulgarian whom the Marquis de Norpois would be sure to dismiss as—to use his own epithet—a 'pestilent' fellow. Now, this attitude on my father's part may be felt to require a few words of explanation, inasmuch as some of us, no doubt, remember a Cottard of distinct mediocrity and a Swann by whom modesty and discretion, in all his social relations, were carried to the utmost refinement of delicacy. But in his case, what had happened was that, to the original 'young Swann' and also to the Swann of the Jockey Club, our old friend had added a fresh personality (which was not to be his last), that of Odette's husband. Adapting to the humble ambitions of that lady the instinct, the desire, the industry which he had always had, he had laboriously constructed for himself, a long way beneath the old, a new position more appropriate to the companion who was to share it with him. In this he shewed himself another man. Since (while he continued to go, by himself, to the houses of his own friends, on whom he did not care to inflict Odette unless they had expressly asked that she should be introduced to them) it was a new life that he had begun to lead, in common with his wife, among a new set of people, it was quite intelligible that, in order to estimate the importance of these new friends and thereby the pleasure, the self-esteem that were to be derived from entertaining them, he should have made use, as a standard of comparison, not of the brilliant society in which he himself had moved before his marriage but of the earlier environment of Odette. And yet, even when one knew that it was with unfashionable officials and their faded wives, the wallflowers of ministerial ball-rooms, that he was now anxious to associate, it was still astonishing to hear him, who in the old days, and even still, would so gracefully refrain from mentioning an invitation to Twickenham or to Marlborough House, proclaim with quite unnecessary emphasis that the wife of some Assistant Under-Secretary for Something had returned Mme. Swann's call. It will perhaps be objected here that what this really implied was that the simplicity of the fashionable Swann had been nothing more than a supreme refinement of vanity, and that, like certain other Israelites, my parents' old friend had contrived to illustrate in turn all the stages through which his race had passed, from the crudest and coarsest form of snobbishness up to the highest pitch of good manners. But the chief reason—and one which is applicable to humanity as a whole—was that our virtues themselves are not free and floating qualities over which we retain a permanent control and power of disposal; they come to be so closely linked in our minds with the actions in conjunction with which we make it our duty to practise them, that, if we are suddenly called upon to perform some action of a different order, it takes us by surprise, and without our supposing for a moment that it might involve the bringing of those very same virtues into play. Swann, in his intense consciousness of his new social surroundings, and in the pride with which he referred to them, was like those great artists—modest or generous by nature—who, if at the end of their career they take to cooking or to gardening, display a childlike gratification at the compliments that are paid to their dishes or their borders, and will not listen to any of the criticism which they heard unmoved when it was applied to their real achievements; or who, after giving away a canvas, cannot conceal their annoyance if they lose a couple of francs at dominoes.

As for Professor Cottard, we shall meet him again and can study him at our leisure, much later in the course of our story, with the 'Mistress,' Mme. Verdurin, in her country house La Raspelière. For the present, the following observations must suffice; first of all, in the case of Swann the alteration might indeed be surprising, since it had been accomplished and yet was not suspected by me when I used to see Gilberte's father in the Champs-Elysées, where, moreover, as he never spoke to me, he could not very well have made any display of his political relations. It is true that, if he had done so, I might not at once have discerned his vanity, for the idea that one has long held of a person is apt to stop one's eyes and ears; my mother, for three whole years, had no more noticed the salve with which one of her nieces used to paint her lips than if it had been wholly and invisibly dissolved in some clear liquid; until one day a streak too much, or possibly something else, brought about the phenomenon known as super-saturation; all the paint that had hitherto passed unperceived was now crystallised, and my mother, in the face of this sudden riot of colour, declared, in the best Combray manner, that it was a perfect scandal, and almost severed relations with her niece. With Cottard, on the contrary, the epoch in which we have seen him assisting at the first introduction of Swann to the Verdurins was now buried in the past; whereas honours, offices and titles come with the passage of years; moreover, a man may be illiterate, and make stupid puns, and yet have a special gift, which no amount of general culture can replace—such as the gift of a great strategist or physician. And so it was not merely as an obscure practitioner, who had attained in course of time to European celebrity, that the rest of his profession regarded Cottard. The most intelligent of the younger doctors used to assert—for a year or two, that is to say, for fashions, being themselves begotten of the desire for change, are quick to change also—that if they themselves ever fell ill Cottard was the only one of the leading men to whom they would entrust their lives. No doubt they preferred, socially, to meet certain others who were better read, more artistic, with whom they could discuss Nietzsche and Wagner. When there was a musical party at Mme. Cottard's, on the evenings when she entertained—in the hope that it might one day make him Dean of the Faculty—the colleagues and pupils of her husband, he, instead of listening, preferred to play cards in another room. Yet everybody praised the quickness, the penetration, the unerring confidence with which, at a glance, he could diagnose disease. Thirdly, in considering the general impression which Professor Cottard must have made on a man like my father, we must bear in mind that the character which a man exhibits in the latter half of his life is not always, even if it is often his original character developed or withered, attenuated or enlarged; it is sometimes the exact opposite, like a garment that has been turned. Except from the Verdurins, who were infatuated with him, Cottard's hesitating manner, his excessive timidity and affability had, in his young days, called down upon him endless taunts and sneers. What charitable friend counselled that glacial air? The importance of his professional standing made it all the more easy to adopt. Wherever he went, save at the Verdurins', where he instinctively became himself again, he would assume a repellent coldness, remain silent as long as possible, be peremptory when he was obliged to speak, and not forget to say the most cutting things. He had every opportunity of rehearsing this new attitude before his patients, who, seeing him for the first time, were not in a position to make comparisons, and would have been greatly surprised to learn that he was not at all a rude man by nature. Complete impassivity was what he strove to attain, and even while visiting his hospital wards, when he allowed himself to utter one of those puns which left everyone, from the house physician to the junior student, helpless with laughter, he would always make it without moving a muscle of his face, while even that was no longer recognisable now that he had shaved off his beard and moustache.

But who, the reader has been asking, was the Marquis de Norpois? Well, he had been Minister Plenipotentiary before the War, and was actually an Ambassador on the Sixteenth of May; in spite of which, and to the general astonishment, he had since been several times chosen to represent France on Extraordinary Missions,—even as Controller of the Public Debt in Egypt, where, thanks to his great capability as a financier, he had rendered important services—by Radical Cabinets under which a reactionary of the middle classes would have declined to serve, and in whose eyes M. de Norpois, in view of his past, his connexions and his opinions, ought presumably to have been suspect. But these advanced Ministers seemed to consider that, in making such an appointment, they were shewing how broad their own minds were, when the supreme interests of France were at stake, were raising themselves above the general run of politicians, were meriting, from the *Journal des Débats* itself, the title of 'Statesmen,' and were reaping direct advantage from the weight that attaches to an aristocratic name and the dramatic interest always aroused by an unexpected appointment. And they knew also that they could reap these advantages by making an appeal to M. de Norpois, without having to fear any want of political loyalty on his part, a fault against which his noble birth not only need not put them on their guard but offered a positive guarantee. And in this calculation the Government of the Republic were not mistaken. In the first place, because an aristocrat of a certain type, brought up from his cradle to regard his name as an integral part of himself of which no accident can deprive him (an asset of whose value his peers, or persons of even higher rank, can form a fairly exact estimate), knows that he can dispense with the efforts (since they can in no way enhance his position) in which, without any appreciable result, so many public men of the middle class spend themselves,—to profess only the 'right' opinions, to frequent only the 'sound' people. Anxious, on the other hand, to increase his own importance in the eyes of the princely or ducal families which take immediate precedence of his own, he knows that he can do so by giving his name that complement which hitherto it has lacked, which will give it priority over other names heraldically its equals: such as political power, a literary or an artistic reputation, or a large fortune. And so what he saves by avoiding the society of the ineffective country squires, after whom all the professional families run helter-skelter, but of his intimacy with whom, were he to profess it, a prince would think nothing, he will lavish on the politicians who (free-masons, or worse, though they be) can advance him in Diplomacy or 'back' him in an election, and on the artists or scientists whose patronage can help him to 'arrive' in those departments in which they excel, on everyone, in fact, who is in a position to confer a fresh distinction or to 'bring off' a rich marriage.

But in the character of M. de Norpois there was this predominant feature, that, in the course of a long career of diplomacy, he had become imbued with that negative, methodical, conservative spirit, called 'governmental,' which is common to all Governments and, under every Government, particularly inspires its Foreign Office. He had imbibed, during that career, an aversion, a dread, a contempt for the methods of procedure, more or less revolutionary and in any event quite incorrect, which are those of an Opposition. Save in the case of a few illiterates—high or low, it makes no matter—by whom no difference in quality is perceptible, what attracts men one to another is not a common point of view but a consanguinity of spirit. An Academician of the kind of Legouvé, and therefore an upholder of the classics, would applaud Maxime Ducamp's or Mezière's eulogy of Victor Hugo with more fervour than that of Boileau by Claudel. A common Nationalism suffices to endear Barrès to his electors, who scarcely distinguish between him and M. Georges Berry, but does not endear him to those of his brother Academicians who, with a similar outlook on politics but a different type of mind, will prefer to him even such open adversaries as M. Ribot and M. Deschanel, with whom, in turn, the most loyal Monarchists feel themselves more closely allied than with Maurras or Léon Daudet, although these also are living in the hope of a glorious Restoration. Miserly in the use of words, not only from a professional scruple of prudence and reserve, but because words themselves have more value, present more subtleties of definition to men whose efforts, protracted over a decade, to bring two countries to an understanding, are condensed, translated—in a speech or in a protocol—into a single adjective, colourless in all appearance, but to them pregnant with a world of meaning, M. de Norpois was considered very stiff, at the Commission, where he sat next to my father, whom everyone else congratulated on the astonishing way in which the old Ambassador unbent to him. My father was himself more astonished than anyone. For not being, as a rule, very affable, his company was little sought outside his own intimate circle, a limitation which he used modestly and frankly to avow. He realised that these overtures were an outcome, in the diplomat, of that point of view which everyone adopts for himself in making his choice of friends, from which all a man's intellectual qualities, his refinement, his affection are a far less potent recommendation of him, when at the same time he bores or irritates one, than are the mere straightforwardness and good-humour of another man whom most people would regard as frivolous or even fatuous. "De Norpois has asked me to dinner again; it's quite extraordinary; everyone on the Commission is amazed, as he never has any personal relations with any of us. I am sure he's going to tell me something thrilling, again, about the 'Seventy war." My father knew that M. de Norpois had warned, had perhaps been alone in warning the Emperor of the growing strength and bellicose designs of Prussia, and that Bismarck rated his intelligence most highly. Only the other day, at the Opera, during the gala performance given for King Theodosius, the newspapers had all drawn attention to the long conversation which that Monarch had held with M. de Norpois. "I must ask him whether the King's visit had any real significance," my father went on, for he was keenly interested in foreign politics. "I know old Norpois keeps very close as a rule, but when he's with me he opens out quite charmingly."

As for my mother, perhaps the Ambassador had not the type of mind towards which she felt herself most attracted. I should add that his conversation furnished so exhaustive a glossary of the superannuated forms of speech peculiar to a certain profession, class and period—a period which, for that profession and that class, might be said not to have altogether passed away—that I sometimes regret that I have not kept any literal record simply of the things that I have heard him say. I should thus have obtained an effect of old-fashioned courtesy by the same process and at as little expense as that actor at the Palais-Royal who, when asked where on earth he managed to find his astounding hats, answered, "I do not find my hats. I keep them." In a word, I suppose that my mother considered M. de Norpois a trifle 'out-of-date,' which was by no means a fault in her eyes, so far as manners were concerned, but attracted her less in the region—not, in this instance, of ideas, for those of M. de Norpois were extremely modern—but of idiom. She felt, however, that she was paying a delicate compliment to her husband when she spoke admiringly of the diplomat who had shewn so remarkable a predilection for him. By confirming in my father's mind the good opinion that he already had of M. de Norpois, and so inducing him to form a good opinion of himself also, she knew that she was carrying out that one of her wifely duties which consisted in making life pleasant and comfortable for her husband, just as when she saw to it that his dinner was perfectly cooked and served in silence. And as she was incapable of deceiving my father, she compelled herself to admire the old Ambassador, so as to be able to praise him with sincerity. Incidentally she could naturally, and did, appreciate his kindness, his somewhat antiquated courtesy (so ceremonious that when, as he was walking along the street, his tall figure rigidly erect, he caught sight of my mother driving past, before raising his hat to her he would fling away the cigar that he had just lighted); his conversation, so elaborately circumspect, in which he referred as seldom as possible to himself and always considered what might interest the person to whom he was speaking; his promptness in answering a letter, which was so astonishing that whenever my father, just after posting one himself to M. de Norpois, saw his handwriting upon an envelope, his first thought was always one of annoyance that their letters must, unfortunately, have crossed in the post; which, one was led to suppose, bestowed upon him the special and luxurious privilege of extraordinary deliveries and collections at all hours of the day and night. My mother marvelled at his being so punctilious although so busy, so friendly although so much in demand, never realising that 'although,' with such people, is invariably an unrecognised 'because,' and that (just as old men are always wonderful for their age, and kings extraordinarily simple, and country cousins astonishingly well-informed) it was the same system of habits that enabled M. de Norpois to undertake so many duties and to be so methodical in answering letters, to go everywhere and to be so friendly when he came to us. Moreover she made the mistake which everyone makes who is unduly modest; she rated everything that concerned herself below, and consequently outside the range of, other people's duties and engagements. The letter which it seemed to her so meritorious in my father's friend to have written us promptly, since in the course of the day he must have had ever so many letters to write, she excepted from that great number of letters, of which actually it was a unit; in the same way she did not consider that dining with us was, for M. de Norpois, merely one of the innumerable activities of his social life; she never guessed that the Ambassador had trained himself, long ago, to look upon dining-out as one of his diplomatic functions, and to display, at table, an inveterate charm which it would have been too much to have expected him specially to discard when he came to dine with us.

The evening on which M. de Norpois first appeared at our table, in a year when I still went to play in the Champs-Elysées, has remained fixed in my memory because the afternoon of the same day was that upon which I at last went to hear Berma, at a *matinée*, in *Phèdre,* and also because in talking to M. de Norpois I realised suddenly, and in a new and different way, how completely the feelings aroused in me by all that concerned Gilberte Swann and her parents differed from any that the same family could inspire in anyone else.

It was no doubt the sight of the depression in which I was plunged by the approach of the New Year holidays, in which, as she herself had informed me, I was to see nothing of Gilberte, that prompted my mother one day, in the hope of distracting my mind, to suggest, "If you are still so anxious to hear Berma, I think that your father would allow you perhaps to go; your grandmother can take you."

But it was because M. de Norpois had told him that he ought to let me hear Berma, that it was an experience for a young man to remember in later life, that my father, who had hitherto been so resolutely opposed to my going and wasting my time, with the added risk of my falling ill again, on what he used to shock my grandmother by calling 'futilities,' was now not far from regarding this manner of spending an afternoon as included, in some vague way, in the list of precious formulae for success in a brilliant career. My grandmother, who, in renouncing on my behalf the profit which, according to her, I should have derived from hearing Berma, had made a considerable sacrifice in the interests of my health, was surprised to find that this last had become of no account at a mere word from M. de Norpois. Reposing the unconquerable hopes of her rationalist spirit in the strict course of fresh air and early hours which had been prescribed for me, she now deplored, as something disastrous, this infringement that I was to make of my rules, and in a tone of despair protested, "How easily led you are!" to my father, who replied angrily "What! So it's you that are not for letting him go, now. That is really too much, after your telling us all day and every day that it would be so good for him."

M. de Norpois had also brought about a change in my father's plans in a matter of far greater importance to myself. My father had always meant me to become a diplomat, and I could not endure the thought that, even if I did have to stay for some years, first, at the Ministry, I should run the risk of being sent, later on, as Ambassador, to capitals in which no Gilberte dwelt. I should have preferred to return to the literary career that I had planned for myself, and had been abandoned, years before, in my wanderings along the Guermantes way. But my father had steadily opposed my devoting myself to literature, which he regarded as vastly inferior to diplomacy, refusing even to dignify it with the title of career, until the day when M. de Norpois, who had little love for the more recent generations of diplomatic agents, assured him that it was quite possible, by writing, to attract as much attention, to receive as much consideration, to exercise as much influence, and at the same time to preserve more independence than in the Embassies.

"Well, well, I should never have believed it. Old Norpois doesn't at all disapprove of your idea of taking up writing," my father had reported. And as he had a certain amount of influence himself, he imagined that there was nothing that could not be 'arranged,' no problem for which a happy solution might not be found in the conversation of people who 'counted.' "I shall bring him back to dinner, one of these days, from the Commission. You must talk to him a little, and let him see what he thinks of you. Write something good that you can shew him; he is an intimate friend of the editor of the *Deux-Mondes;* he will get you in there; he will arrange it all, the cunning old fox; and, upon my soul, he seems to think that diplomacy, nowadays—— !"

My happiness in the prospect of not being separated from Gilberte made me desirous, but not capable, of writing something good which could be shewn to M. de Norpois. After a few laboured pages, weariness made the pen drop from my fingers; I cried with anger at the thought that I should never have any talent, that I was not 'gifted,' that I could not even take advantage of the chance that M. de Norpois's coming visit was to offer me of spending the rest of my life in Paris. The recollection that I was to be taken to hear Berma alone distracted me from my grief. But just as I did not wish to see any storms except on those coasts where they raged with most violence, so I should not have cared to hear the great actress except in one of those classic parts in which Swann had told me that she touched the sublime. For when it is in the hope of making a priceless discovery that we desire to receive certain impressions from nature or from works of art, we have certain scruples about allowing our soul to gather, instead of these, other, inferior, impressions, which are liable to make us form a false estimate of the value of Beauty. Berma in *Andromaque,* in *Les Caprices de Marianne,* in *Phèdre,* was one of those famous spectacles which my imagination had so long desired. I should enjoy the same rapture as on the day when in a gondola I glided to the foot of the Titian of the Frari or the Carpaccios of San Giorgio dei Schiavoni, were I ever to hear Berma repeat the lines beginning,

"On dit qu'un prompt départ vous éloigne de nous, Seigneur,——"

I was familiar with them from the simple reproduction in black and white which was given of them upon the printed page; but my heart beat furiously at the thought—as of the realisation of a long-planned voyage—that I should at length behold them, bathed and brought to life in the atmosphere and sunshine of the voice of gold. A Carpaccio in Venice, Berma in *Phèdre,* masterpieces of pictorial or dramatic art which the glamour, the dignity attaching to them made so living to me, that is to say so indivisible, that if I had been taken to see Carpaccios in one of the galleries of the Louvre, or Berma in some piece of which I had never heard, I should not have experienced the same delicious amazement at finding myself at length, with wide-open eyes, before the unique and inconceivable object of so many thousand dreams. Then, while I waited, expecting to derive from Berma's playing the revelation of certain aspects of nobility and tragic grief, it would seem to me that whatever greatness, whatever truth there might be in her playing must be enhanced if the actress imposed it upon a work of real value, instead of what would, after all, be but embroidering a pattern of truth and beauty upon a commonplace and vulgar web.

Finally, if I went to hear Berma in a new piece, it would not be easy for me to judge of her art, of her diction, since I should not be able to differentiate between a text which was not already familiar and what she added to it by her intonations and gestures, an addition which would seem to me to be embodied in the play itself; whereas the old plays, the classics which I knew by heart, presented themselves to me as vast and empty walls, reserved and made ready for my inspection, on which I should be able to appreciate without restriction the devices by which Berma would cover them, as with frescoes, with the perpetually fresh treasures of her inspiration. Unfortunately, for some years now, since she had retired from the great theatres, to make the fortune of one on the boulevards where she was the 'star,' she had ceased to appear in classic parts; and in vain did I scan the hoardings; they never advertised any but the newest pieces, written specially for her by authors in fashion at the moment. When, one morning, as I stood searching the column of announcements to find the afternoon performances for the week of the New Year holidays, I saw there for the first time—at the foot of the bill, after some probably insignificant curtain-raiser, whose title was opaque to me because it had latent in it all the details of an action of which I was ignorant—two acts of *Phèdre* with Mme. Berma, and, on the following afternoons, *Le Demi-Monde, Les Caprices de Marianne,* names which, like that of *Phèdre,* were for me transparent, filled with light only, so familiar were those works to me, illuminated to their very depths by the revealing smile of art. They seemed to me to invest with a fresh nobility Mme. Berma herself when I read in the newspapers, after the programme of these performances, that it was she who had decided to shew herself once more to the public in some of her early creations. She was conscious, then, that certain stage-parts have an interest which survives the novelty of their first production or the success of a revival; she regarded them, when interpreted by herself, as museum pieces which it might be instructive to set before the eyes of the generation which had admired her in them long ago, or of that which had never yet seen her in them. In thus advertising, in the middle of a column of plays intended only to while away an evening, this *Phèdre,* a title no longer than any of the rest, nor set in different type, she added something indescribable, as though a hostess, introducing you, before you all go in to dinner, to her other guests, were to mention, casually, amid the string of names which are the names of guests and nothing more, and without any change of tone:—"M. Anatole France."

The doctor who was attending me—the same who had forbidden me to travel—advised my parents not to let me go to the theatre; I should only be ill again afterwards, perhaps for weeks, and should in the long run derive more pain than pleasure from the experience. The fear of this might have availed to stop me, if what I had anticipated from such a spectacle had been only a pleasure for which a subsequent pain could so compensate as to cancel it. But what I demanded from this performance—just as from the visit to Balbec, the visit to Venice for which I had so intensely longed—was something quite different from pleasure; a series of verities pertaining to a world more real than that in which I lived, which, once acquired, could never be taken from me again by any of the trivial incidents—even though it were the cause of bodily suffering—of my otiose existence. At best, the pleasure which I was to feel during the performance appeared to me as the perhaps inevitable form of the perception of these truths; and I hoped only that the illness which had been forecast for me would not begin until the play was finished, so that my pleasure should not be in any way compromised or spoiled. I implored my parents, who, after the doctor's visit, were no longer inclined to let me go to *Phèdre*. I repeated, all day long, to myself, the speech beginning,

> "On dit qu'un prompt départ vous éloigne de nous,——"

seeking out every intonation that could be put into it, so as to be able better to measure my surprise at the way which Berma would have found of uttering the lines. Concealed, like the Holy of Holies, beneath the veil that screened her from my gaze, behind which I invested her, every moment, with a fresh aspect, according to which of the words of Bergotte—in the pamphlet that Gilberte had found for me—was passing through my mind; "plastic nobility," "Christian austerity" or "Jansenist pallor," "Princess of Troezen and of Cleves" or "Mycenean drama," "Delphic symbol," "Solar myth"; that divine Beauty, whom Berma's acting was to reveal to me, night and day, upon an altar perpetually illumined, sat enthroned in the sanctuary of my mind, my mind for which not itself but my stern, my fickle parents were to decide whether or not it was to enshrine, and for all time, the perfections of the Deity unveiled, in the same spot where was now her invisible form. And with my eyes fixed upon that inconceivable image, I strove from morning to night to overcome the barriers which my family were putting in my way. But when those had at last fallen, when my mother—albeit this *matinée* was actually to coincide with the meeting of the Commission from which my father had promised to bring M. de Norpois home to dinner—had said to me, "Very well, we don't wish you to be unhappy;—if you think that you will enjoy it so very much, you must go; that's all;" when this day of theatre-going, hitherto forbidden and unattainable, depended now only upon myself, then for the first time, being no longer troubled by the wish that it might cease to be impossible, I asked myself if it were desirable, if there were not other reasons than my parents' prohibition which should make me abandon my design. In the first place, whereas I had been detesting them for their cruelty, their consent made them now so dear to me that the thought of causing them pain stabbed me also with a pain through which the purpose of life shewed itself as the pursuit not of truth but of loving-kindness, and life itself seemed good or evil only as my parents were happy or sad. "I would rather not go, if it hurts you," I told my mother, who, on the contrary, strove hard to expel from my mind any lurking fear that she might regret my going, since that, she said, would spoil the pleasure that I should otherwise derive from *Phèdre*, and it was the thought of my pleasure that had induced my father and her to reverse their earlier decision. But then this sort of obligation to find a pleasure in the performance seemed to me very burdensome. Besides, if I returned home ill, should I be well again in time to be able to go to the Champs-Elysées as soon as the holidays were over and Gilberte returned? Against all these arguments I set, so as to decide which course I should take, the idea, invisible there behind its veil, of the perfections of Berma. I cast into one pan of the scales "Making Mamma unhappy," "risking not being able to go on the Champs-Elysées," and the other, "Jansenist pallor," "Solar myth," until the words themselves grew dark and clouded in my mind's vision, ceased to say anything to me, lost all their force; and gradually my hesitations became so painful that if I had now decided upon the theatre it would have been only that I might bring them to an end, and be delivered from them once and for all. It would have been to fix a term to my sufferings, and no longer in the expectation of an intellectual benediction, yielding to the attractions of perfection, that I would let myself be taken, not now to the Wise Goddess, but to the stern, implacable Divinity, featureless and unnamed, who had been secretly substituted for her behind the veil. But suddenly everything was altered. My desire to go and hear Berma received a fresh stimulus which enabled me to await the coming of the *matinée* with impatience and with joy; having gone to take up, in front of the column on which the playbills were, my daily station, as excruciating, of late, as that of a stylite saint, I had seen there, still moist and wrinkled, the complete bill of *Phèdre,* which had just been pasted up for the first time (and on which, I must confess, the rest of the cast furnished no additional attraction which could help me to decide). But it gave to one of the points between which my indecision wavered a form at once more concrete and—inasmuch as the bill was dated not from the day on which I read it but from that on which the performance would take place, and from the very hour at which the curtain would rise—almost imminent, well on the way, already, to its realisation, so that I jumped for joy before the column at the thought that on that day, and at that hour precisely, I should be sitting there in my place, ready to hear the voice of Berma; and for fear lest my parents might not now be in time to secure two good seats for my grandmother and myself, I raced back to the house, whipped on by the magic words which had now taken the place, in my mind, of "Jansenist pallor" and "Solar myth";—"Ladies will not be admitted to the stalls in hats. The doors will be closed at two o'clock."

Alas! that first *matinée* was to prove a bitter disappointment. My father offered to drop my grandmother and me at the theatre, on his way to the Commission. Before leaving the house he said to my mother: "See that you have a good dinner for us to-night; you remember, I'm bringing de Norpois back with me." My mother had not forgotten. And all that day, and overnight, Françoise, rejoicing in the opportunity to devote herself to that art of the kitchen,—of which she was indeed a past-master, stimulated, moreover, by the prospect of having a new guest to feed, the consciousness that she would have to compose, by methods known to her alone, a dish of beef in jelly,—had been living in the effervescence of creation; since she attached the utmost importance to the intrinsic quality of the materials which were to enter into the fabric of her work, she had gone herself to the Halles to procure the best cuts of rump-steak, shin of beef, calves'-feet, as Michelangelo passed eight months in the mountains of Carrara choosing the most perfect blocks of marble for the monument of Julius II—Françoise expended on these comings and goings so much ardour that Mamma, at the sight of her flaming cheeks, was alarmed lest our old servant should make herself ill with overwork, like the sculptor of the Tombs of the Medici in the quarries of Pietrasanta. And overnight Françoise had sent to be cooked in the baker's oven, shielded with breadcrumbs, like a block of pink marble packed in sawdust, what she called a "Nev'-York ham." Believing the language to be less rich than it actually was in words, and her own ears less trustworthy, the first time that she heard anyone mention York ham she had thought, no doubt,—feeling it to be hardly conceivable that the dictionary could be so prodigal as to include at once a 'York' and a 'New York'—that she had misheard what was said, and that the ham was really called by the name already familiar to her. And so, ever since, the word York was preceded in her ears, or before her eyes when she read it in an advertisement, by the affix 'New' which she pronounced 'Nev'.' And it was with the most perfect faith that she would say to her kitchen-maid: "Go and fetch me a ham from Olida's. Madame told me especially to get a Nev'-York." On that particular day, if Françoise was consumed by the burning certainty of creative genius, my lot was the cruel anxiety of the seeker after truth. No doubt, so long as I had not yet heard Berma speak, I still felt some pleasure. I felt it in the little square that lay in front of the theatre, in which, in two hours' time, the bare boughs of the chestnut trees would gleam with a metallic lustre as the lighted gas-lamps shewed up every detail of their structure; before the attendants in the box-office, the selection of whom, their promotion, all their destiny depended upon the great artist—for she alone held power in the theatre, where ephemeral managers followed one after the other in an obscure succession—who took our tickets without even glancing at us, so preoccupied were they with their anxiety lest any of Mme. Berma's instructions had not been duly transmitted to the new members of the staff, lest it was not clearly, everywhere, understood that the hired applause must never sound for her, that the windows must all be kept open so long as she was not on the stage, and every door closed tight, the moment that she appeared; that a bowl of hot water must be concealed somewhere close to her, to make the dust settle: and, for that matter, at any moment now her carriage, drawn by a pair of horses with flowing manes, would be stopping outside the theatre, she would alight from it muffled in furs, and, crossly acknowledging everyone's salute, would send one of her attendants to find out whether a stage box had been kept for her friends, what the temperature was 'in front,' who were in the other boxes, if the programme sellers were looking smart; theatre and public being to her no more than a second, an outermost cloak which she would put on, and the medium, the more or less 'good' conductor through which her talent would have to pass. I was happy, too, in the theatre itself; since I had made the discovery that—in contradiction of the picture so long entertained by my childish imagination—there was but one stage for everybody, I had supposed that I should be prevented from seeing it properly by the presence of the other spectators, as one is when in the thick of a crowd; now I registered the fact that, on the contrary, thanks to an arrangement which is, so to speak, symbolical of all spectatorship, everyone feels himself to be the centre of the theatre; which explained to me why, when Françoise had been sent once to see some melodrama from the top gallery, she had assured us on her return that her seat had been the best in the house, and that instead of finding herself too far from the stage she had been positively frightened by the mysterious and living proximity of the curtain. My pleasure increased further when I began to distinguish behind the said lowered curtain such confused rappings as one hears through the shell of an egg before the chicken emerges, sounds which speedily grew louder and suddenly, from that world which, impenetrable by our eyes, yet scrutinised us with its own, addressed themselves, and to us indubitably, in the imperious form of three consecutive hammer-blows as moving as any signals from the planet Mars. And—once this curtain had risen,—when on the stage a writing-table and a fireplace, in no way out of the ordinary, had indicated that the persons who were about to enter would be, not actors come to recite, as I had seen them once and heard them at an evening party, but real people, just living their lives at home, on whom I was thus able to spy without their seeing me—my pleasure still endured; it was broken by a momentary uneasiness; just as I was straining my ears in readiness before the piece began, two men entered the theatre from the side of the stage, who must have been very angry with each other, for they were talking so loud that in the auditorium, where there were at least a thousand people, we could hear every word, whereas in quite a small *café* one is obliged to call the waiter and ask what it is that two men, who appear to be quarrelling, are saying; but at that moment, while I sat astonished to find that the audience was listening to them without protest, drowned as it was in a universal silence upon which broke, presently, a laugh here and there, I understood that these insolent fellows were the actors and that the short piece known as the 'curtain-raiser' had now begun. It was followed by an interval so long that the audience, who had returned to their places, grew impatient and began to stamp their feet. I was terrified at this; for just as in the report of a criminal trial, when I read that some noble-minded person was coming, against his own interests, to testify on behalf of an innocent prisoner, I was always afraid that they would not be nice enough to him, would not shew enough gratitude, would not recompense him lavishly, and that he, in disgust, would then range himself on the side of injustice; so now attributing to genius, in this respect, the same qualities as to virtue, I was afraid lest Berma, annoyed by the bad behaviour of so ill-bred an audience—in which, on the other hand, I should have liked her to recognise, with satisfaction, a few celebrities to whose judgment she would be bound to attach importance—should express her discontent and disdain by acting badly. And I gazed appealingly round me at these stamping brutes who were about to shatter, in their insensate rage, the rare and fragile impression which I had come to seek. The last moments of my pleasure were during the opening scenes of *Phèdre*. The heroine herself does not appear in these first scenes of the second act; and yet, as soon as the curtain rose, and another curtain, of red velvet this time, was parted in the middle (a curtain which was used to halve the depth of the stage in all the plays in which the 'star' appeared), an actress entered from the back who had the face and voice which, I had been told, were those of Berma. The cast must therefore have been changed; all the trouble that I had taken in studying the part of the wife of Theseus was wasted. But a second actress now responded to the first. I must, then, have been mistaken in supposing that the first was Berma, for the second even more closely resembled her, and, more than the other, had her diction. Both of them, moreover, enriched their parts with noble gestures—which I could vividly distinguish, and could appreciate in their relation to the text, while they raised and let fall the lovely folds of their tunics—and also with skilful changes of tone, now passionate, now ironical, which made me realise the significance of lines that I had read to myself at home without paying sufficient attention to what they really meant. But all of a sudden, in the cleft of the red curtain that veiled her sanctuary, as in a frame, appeared a woman, and simultaneously with the fear that seized me, far more vexing than Berma's fear could be, lest someone should upset her by opening a window, or drown one of her lines by rustling a programme, or annoy her by applauding the others and by not applauding her enough;—in my own fashion, still more absolute than Berma's, of considering from that moment theatre, audience, play and my own body only as an acoustic medium of no importance, save in the degree to which it was favourable to the inflexions of that voice,—I realised that the two actresses whom I had been for some minutes admiring bore not the least resemblance to her whom I had come to hear. But at the same time all my pleasure had ceased; in vain might I strain towards Berma's eyes, ears, mind, so as not to let one morsel escape me of the reasons which she would furnish for my admiring her, I did not succeed in gathering a single one. I could not even, as I could with her companions, distinguish in her diction and in her playing intelligent intonations, beautiful gestures. I listened to her as though I were reading *Phèdre*, or as though Phaedra herself had at that moment uttered the words that I was hearing, without its appearing that Berma's talent had added anything at all to them. I could have wished, so as to be able to explore them fully, so as to attempt to discover what it was in them that was beautiful, to arrest, to immobilise for a time before my senses every intonation of the artist's voice, every expression of her features; at least I did attempt, by dint of my mental agility in having, before a line came, my attention ready and tuned to catch it, not to waste upon preparations any morsel of the precious time that each word, each gesture occupied, and, thanks to the intensity of my observation, to manage to penetrate as far into them as if I had had whole hours to spend upon them, by myself. But how short their duration was! Scarcely had a sound been received by my ear than it was displaced there by another. In one scene, where Berma stands motionless for a moment, her arm raised to the level of a face bathed, by some piece of stagecraft, in a greenish light, before a back-cloth painted to represent the sea, the whole house broke out in applause; but already the actress had moved, and the picture that I should have liked to study existed no longer. I told my grandmother that I could not see very well; she handed me her glasses. Only, when one believes in the reality of a thing, making it visible by artificial means is not quite the same as feeling that it is close at hand. I thought now that it was no longer Berma at whom I was looking, but her image in a magnifying glass. I put the glasses down, but then possibly the image that my eye received of her, diminished by distance, was no more exact; which of the two Bermas was the real? As for her speech to Hippolyte, I had counted enormously upon that, since, to judge by the ingenious significance which her companions were disclosing to me at every moment in less beautiful parts, she would certainly render it with intonations more surprising than any which, when reading the play at home, I had contrived to imagine; but she did not attain to the heights which Œnone or Aricie would naturally have reached, she planed down into a uniform flow of melody the whole of a passage in which there were mingled together contradictions so striking that the least intelligent of tragic actresses, even the pupils of an academy, could not have missed their effect; besides which, she ran through the speech so rapidly that it was only when she had come to the last line that my mind became aware of the deliberate monotony which she had imposed on it throughout.

Then, at last, a sense of admiration did possess me, provoked by the frenzied applause of the audience. I mingled my own with theirs, endeavouring to prolong the general sound so that Berma, in her gratitude, should surpass herself, and I be certain of having heard her on one of her great days. A curious thing, by the way, was that the moment when this storm of public enthusiasm broke loose was, as I afterwards learned, that in which Berma reveals one of her richest treasures. It would appear that certain transcendent realities emit all around them a radiance to which the crowd is sensitive. So it is that when any great event occurs, when on a distant frontier an army is in jeopardy, or defeated, or victorious, the vague and conflicting reports which we receive, from which an educated man can derive little enlightenment, stimulate in the crowd an emotion by which that man is surprised, and in which, once expert criticism has informed him of the actual military situation, he recognises the popular perception of that 'aura' which surrounds momentous happenings, and which may be visible hundreds of miles away. One learns of a victory either after the war is over, or at once, from the hilarious joy of one's hall porter. One discovers the touch of genius in Berma's acting a week after one has heard her, in the criticism of some review, or else on the spot, from the thundering acclamation of the stalls. But this immediate recognition by the crowd was mingled with a hundred others, all quite erroneous; the applause came, most often, at wrong moments, apart from the fact that it was mechanically produced by the effect of the applause that had gone before, just as in a storm, once the sea is sufficiently disturbed, it will continue to swell, even after the wind has begun to subside. No matter; the more I applauded, the better, it seemed to me, did Berma act. "I say," came from a woman sitting near me, of no great social pretensions, "she fairly gives it you, she does; you'd think she'd do herself an injury, the way she runs about. I call that acting, don't you?" And happy to find these reasons for Berma's superiority, though not without a suspicion that they no more accounted for it than would for that of the Gioconda or of Benvenuto's Perseus a peasant's gaping "That's a good bit of work. It's all gold, look! Fine, ain't it?", I greedily imbibed the strong wine of this popular enthusiasm. I felt, all the same, when the curtain had fallen for the last time, disappointed that the pleasure for which I had so longed had been no greater, but at the same time I felt the need to prolong it, not to depart for ever, when I left the theatre, from this strange life of the stage which had, for a few hours, been my own, from which I should be tearing myself away, as though I were going into exile, when I returned to my own home, had I not hoped there to learn a great deal more about Berma from her admirer, to whom I was indebted already for the permission to go to *Phèdre,* M. de Norpois. I was introduced to him before dinner by my father, who summoned me into his study for the purpose. As I entered, the Ambassador rose, held out his hand, bowed his tall figure and fixed his blue eyes attentively on my face. As the foreign visitors who used to be presented to him, in the days when he still represented France abroad, were all more or less (even the famous singers) persons of note, with regard to whom he could tell, when he met them, that he would be able to say, later on, when he heard their names mentioned in Paris or in Petersburg, that he remembered perfectly the evening he had spent with them at Munich or Sofia, he had formed the habit of impressing upon them, by his affability, the pleasure with which he was making their acquaintance; but in addition to this, being convinced that in the life of European capitals, in contact at once with all the interesting personalities that passed through them and with the manners and customs of the native populations, one acquired a deeper insight than could be gained from books into the intellectual movement throughout Europe, he would exercise upon each newcomer his keen power of observation, so as to decide at once with what manner of man he had to deal. The Government had not for some time now entrusted to him a post abroad, but still, as soon as anyone was introduced to him, his eyes, as though they had not yet been informed of their master's retirement, began their fruitful observation, while by his whole attitude he endeavoured to convey that the stranger's name was not unknown to him. And so, all the time, while he spoke to me kindly and with the air of importance of a man who is conscious of the vastness of his own experience, he never ceased to examine me with a sagacious curiosity, and to his own profit, as though I had been some exotic custom, some historic and instructive building or some 'star' upon his course. And in this way he gave proof at once, in his attitude towards me, of the majestic benevolence of the sage Mentor and of the zealous curiosity of the young Anacharsis.

He offered me absolutely no opening to the *Revue des Deux-Mondes,* but put a number of questions to me on what I had been doing and reading; asked what were my own inclinations, which I heard thus spoken of for the first time as though it might be a quite reasonable thing to obey their promptings, whereas hitherto I had always supposed it to be my duty to suppress them. Since they attracted me towards Literature, he did not dissuade me from that course; on the contrary, he spoke of it with deference, as of some venerable personage whose select circle, in Rome or at Dresden, one remembers with pleasure, and regrets only that one's multifarious duties in life enable one to revisit it so seldom. He appeared to be envying me, with an almost jovial smile, the delightful hours which, more fortunate than himself and more free, I should be able to spend with such a Mistress. But the very terms that he employed shewed me Literature as something entirely different from the image that I had formed of it at Combray, and I realised that I had been doubly right in abandoning my intention. Until now, I had reckoned only that I had not the 'gift' for writing; now M. de Norpois took from me the ambition also. I wanted to express to him what had been my dreams; trembling with emotion, I was painfully apprehensive that all the words which I could utter would not be the sincerest possible equivalent of what I had felt, what I had never yet attempted to formulate; that is to say that my words had no clear significance. Perhaps by a professional habit, perhaps by virtue of the calm that is acquired by every important personage whose advice is commonly sought, and who, knowing that he will keep the control of the conversation in his own hands, allows the other party to fret, to struggle, to take his time; perhaps also to emphasize the dignity of his head (Greek, according to himself, despite his sweeping whiskers), M. de Norpois, while anything was being explained to him, would preserve a facial immobility as absolute as if you had been addressing some ancient and unhearing bust in a museum. Until suddenly, falling upon you like an auctioneer's hammer, or a Delphic oracle, the Ambassador's voice, as he replied to you, would be all the more impressive, in that nothing in his face had allowed you to guess what sort of impression you had made on him, or what opinion he was about to express.

"Precisely;" he suddenly began, as though the case were now heard and judged, and after allowing me to writhe in increasing helplessness beneath those motionless eyes which never for an instant left my face. "There is the case of the son of one of my friends, which, *mutatis mutandis,* is very much like yours." He adopted in speaking of our common tendency the same reassuring tone as if it had been a tendency not to literature but to rheumatics, and he had wished to assure me that it would not necessarily prove fatal. "He too has chosen to leave the Quai d'Orsay, although the way had been paved for him there by his father, and without caring what people might say, he has settled down to write. And certainly, he's had no reason to regret it. He published two years ago—of course, he's much older than you, you understand—a book dealing with the Sense of the Infinite on the Western Shore of Victoria Nyanza, and this year he has brought out a little thing, not so important as the other, but very brightly, in places perhaps almost too pointedly written, on the Repeating Rifle in the Bulgarian Army; and these have put him quite in a class by himself. He's gone pretty far already, and he's not the sort of man to stop half way; I happen to know that (without any suggestion, of course, of his standing for election) his name has been mentioned several times, in conversation, and not at all unfavourably, at the Academy of Moral Sciences. And so, one can't say yet, of course, that he has reached the pinnacle of fame, still he has made his way, by sheer industry, to a very fine position indeed, and success—which doesn't always come only to agitators and mischief-makers and men who make trouble which is usually more than they are prepared to take—success has crowned his efforts."

My father, seeing me already, in a few years' time, an Academician, was tasting a contentment which M. de Norpois raised to the supreme pitch when, after a momentary hesitation in which he appeared to be calculating the possible consequences of so rash an act, he handed me his card and said: "Why not go and see him yourself? Tell him I sent you. He may be able to give you some good advice," plunging me by his words into as painful a state of anxiety as if he had told me that, next morning, I was to embark as cabin-boy on board a sailing ship, and to go round the world.

My Aunt Léonie had bequeathed to me, together with all sorts of other things and much of her furniture, with which it was difficult to know what to do, almost all her unsettled estate—revealing thus after her death an affection for me which I had hardly suspected in her lifetime. My father, who was trustee of this estate until I came of age, now consulted M. de Norpois with regard to several of the investments. He recommended certain stocks bearing a low rate of interest, which he considered particularly sound, notably English consols and Russian four per cents. "With absolutely first class securities such as those," said M. de Norpois, "even if your income from them is nothing very great, you may be certain of never losing any of your capital." My father then told him, roughly, what else he had bought. M. de Norpois gave a just perceptible smile of congratulation; like all capitalists, he regarded wealth as an enviable thing, but thought it more delicate to compliment people upon their possessions only by a half-indicated sign of intelligent sympathy; on the other hand, as he was himself immensely rich, he felt that he shewed his good taste by seeming to regard as considerable the meagre revenues of his friends, with a happy and comforting resilience to the superiority of his own. He made amends for this by congratulating my father, without hesitation, on the "composition" of his list of investments, selected "with so sure, so delicate, so fine a taste." You would have supposed, to hear him, that he attributed to the relative values of investments, and even to investments themselves, something akin to aesthetic merit. Of one, comparatively recent and still little known, which my father mentioned, M. de Norpois, like the people who have always read the books of which, you imagine, you yourself alone have ever heard, said at once, "Ah, yes, I used to amuse myself for some time with watching it in the papers; it was quite interesting," with the retrospective smile of a regular subscriber who has read the latest novel already, in monthly instalments, in his magazine. "It would not be at all a bad idea to apply for some of this new issue. It is distinctly attractive; they are offering it at a most tempting discount." But when he came to some of the older investments, my father, who could not remember their exact names, which it was easy to confuse with others of the same kind, opened a drawer and shewed the securities themselves to the Ambassador. The sight of them enchanted me. They were ornamented with cathedral spires and allegorical figures, like the old, romantic editions that I had pored over as a child. All the products of one period have something in common; the artists who illustrate the poetry of their generation are the same artists who are employed by the big financial houses. And nothing reminds me so much of the monthly parts of *Notre-Dame de Paris,* and of various books by Gérard de Nerval, that used to hang outside the grocer's door at Combray, than does, in its rectangular and flowery border, supported by recumbent river-gods, a 'personal share' in the Water Company.

The contempt which my father had for my kind of intelligence was so far tempered by his natural affection for me that, in practice, his attitude towards anything that I might do was one of blind indulgence. And so he had no qualm about telling me to fetch a little 'prose poem' which I had made up, years before, at Combray, while coming home from a walk. I had written it down in a state of exaltation which must, I felt certain, infect everyone who read it. But it was not destined to captivate M. de Norpois, for he handed it back to me without a word.

My mother, who had the most profound respect for all my father's occupations, came in now, timidly, to ask whether dinner might be served. She was afraid to interrupt a conversation in which she herself could have no part. And indeed my father was continually reminding the Marquis of some useful suggestion which they had decided to make at the next meeting of the Commission; speaking in the peculiar tone always adopted, when in a strange environment by a pair of colleagues—as exclusive, in this respect, as two young men from the same college—whose professional routine has furnished them with a common fund of memories to which the others present have no access, and to which they are unwilling to refer before an audience.

But the absolute control over his facial muscles to which M. de Norpois had attained allowed him to listen without seeming to hear a word. At last my father became uneasy. "I had thought," he ventured, after an endless preamble, "of asking the advice of the Commission . . ." Then from the face of the noble virtuoso, who had been sitting inert as a player in an orchestra sits until the moment comes for him to begin his part, were uttered, with an even delivery, on a sharp note, and as though they were no more than the completion (but scored for a different voice) of the phrase that my father had begun, the words: "of which you will not hesitate, of course, to call a meeting; more especially as the present members are all known to you personally, and there may be a change any day." This was not in itself a very remarkable ending. But the immobility that had preceded it made it detach itself with the crystal clarity, the almost malicious unexpectedness of those phrases in which the piano, silent until then, 'takes up,' at a given moment, the violoncello to which one has just been listening, in a Mozart concerto.

"Well, did you enjoy your *matinée?*" asked my father, as we moved to the dining-room; meaning me to 'shew off,' and with the idea that my enthusiasm would give M. de Norpois a good opinion of me. "He has just been to hear Berma. You remember, we were talking about it the other day," he went on, turning towards the diplomat, in the same tone of retrospective, technical, mysterious allusiveness as if he had been referring to a meeting of the Commission.

"You must have been enchanted, especially if you had never heard her before. Your father was alarmed at the effect that the little jaunt might have upon your health, which is none too good, I am told, none too robust. But I soon set his mind at rest. Theatres to-day are not what they were even twenty years ago. You have more or less comfortable seats now, and a certain amount of ventilation, although we have still a long way to go before we come up to Germany or England, which in that respect as in many others are immeasurably ahead of us. I have never seen Mme. Berma in *Phèdre,* but I have always heard that she is excellent in the part. You were charmed with her, of course?"

M. de Norpois, a man a thousand times more intelligent than myself, must know that hidden truth which I had failed to extract from Berma's playing; he knew, and would reveal it to me; in answering his question I would implore him to let me know in what that truth consisted; and he would tell me, and so justify me in the longing that I had felt to see and hear the actress. I had only a moment, I must make what use I could of it and bring my cross-examination to bear upon the essential points. But what were they? Fastening my whole attention upon my own so confused impressions, with no thought of making M. de Norpois admire me, but only that of learning from him the truth that I had still to discover, I made no attempt to substitute ready-made phrases for the words that failed me—I stood there stammering, until finally, in the hope of provoking him into declaring what there was in Berma that was admirable, I confessed that I had been disappointed.

"What's that?" cried my father, annoyed at the bad impression which this admission of my failure to appreciate the performance must make on M. de Norpois, "What on earth do you mean; you didn't enjoy it? Why, your grandmother has been telling us that you sat there hanging on every word that Berma uttered, with your eyes starting out of your head; that everyone else in the theatre seemed quite bored, beside you."

"Oh, yes, I was listening as hard as I could, trying to find out what it was that was supposed to be so wonderful about her. Of course, she's frightfully good, and all that . . ."

"If she is 'frightfully good,' what more do you want?"

"One of the things that have undoubtedly contributed to the success of Mme. Berma," resumed M. de Norpois, turning with elaborate courtesy towards my mother, so as not to let her be left out of the conversation, and in conscientious fulfilment of his duty of politeness to the lady of the house, "is the perfect taste that she shews in selecting her parts; thus she can always be assured of success, and success of the right sort. She hardly ever appears in anything trivial. Look how she has thrown herself into the part of Phèdre. And then, she brings the same good taste to the choice of her costumes, and to her acting. In spite of her frequent and lucrative tours in England and America, the vulgarity—I will not say of John Bull; that would be unjust, at any rate to the England of the Victorian era—but of Uncle Sam has not infected her. No loud colours, no rant. And then that admirable voice, which has been of such service to her, with which she plays so delightfully—I should almost be tempted to describe it as a musical instrument!"

My interest in Berma's acting had continued to grow ever since the fall of the curtain, because it was then no longer compressed within the limits of reality; but I felt the need to find explanations for it; moreover it had been fixed with the same intensity, while Berma was on the stage, upon everything that she offered, in the indivisibility of a living whole, to my eyes and ears; there was nothing separate or distinct; it welcomed, accordingly, the discovery of a reasonable cause in these tributes paid to the simplicity, to the good taste of the actress, it attracted them to itself by its power of absorption, seized hold of them, as the optimism of a drunken man seizes hold of the actions of his neighbour, in each of which he finds an excuse for emotion. "He is right!" I told myself. "What a charming voice, what an absence of shrillness, what simple costumes, what intelligence to have chosen *Phèdre*. No; I have not been disappointed!"

The cold beef, spiced with carrots, made its appearance, couched by the Michelangelo of our kitchen upon enormous crystals of jelly, like transparent blocks of quartz.

"You have a chef of the first order, Madame," said M. de Norpois, "and that is no small matter. I myself, who have had, when abroad, to maintain a certain style in housekeeping, I know how difficult it often is to find a perfect master-cook. But this is a positive banquet that you have set before us!"

And indeed Françoise, in the excitement of her ambition to make a success, for so distinguished a guest, of a dinner the preparation of which had been obstructed by difficulties worthy of her powers, had given herself such trouble as she no longer took when we were alone, and had recaptured her incomparable Combray manner.

"That is a thing you can't get in a chophouse,—in the best of them, I mean; a spiced beef in which the jelly does not taste of glue and the beef has caught the flavour of the carrots; it is admirable! Allow me to come again," he went on, making a sign to shew that he wanted more of the jelly. "I should be interested to see how your Vatel managed a dish of quite a different kind; I should like, for instance, to see him tackle a *bœuf Stroganoff*."

M. de Norpois, so as to add his own contribution to the gaiety of the repast, entertained us with a number of the stories with which he was in the habit of regaling his colleagues in "the career," quoting now some ludicrous sentence uttered by a politician, an old offender, whose sentences were always long and packed with incoherent images, now some monumental epigram of a diplomat, sparkling with attic salt. But, to tell the truth, the criterion which for him set apart these two kinds of phrase in no way resembled that which I was in the habit of applying to literature. Most of the finer shades escaped me; the words which he repeated with derision seemed to me not to differ very greatly from those which he found remarkable. He belonged to the class of men who, had we come to discuss the books that I liked, would have said: "So you understand that, do you? I must confess that I do not understand, I am not initiated;" but I could have matched his attitude, for I did not grasp the wit or folly, the eloquence or pomposity which he found in a statement or a speech, and the absence of any perceptible reason for one's being badly and the other's well expressed made that sort of literature seem more mysterious, more obscure to me than any other. I could distinguish only that to repeat what everybody else was thinking was, in politics, the mark not of an inferior but of a superior mind. When M. de Norpois made use of certain expressions which were 'common form' in the newspapers, and uttered them with emphasis, one felt that they became an official pronouncement by the mere fact of his having employed them, and a pronouncement which would provoke a string of comment.

My mother was counting greatly upon the pineapple and truffle salad. But the Ambassador, after fastening for a moment on the confection the penetrating gaze of a trained observer, ate it with the inscrutable discretion of a diplomat, and without disclosing to us what he thought of it. My mother insisted upon his taking some more, which he did, but saying only, in place of the compliment for which she was hoping: "I obey, Madame, for I can see that it is, on your part, a positive ukase!"

"We saw in the 'papers that you had a long talk with King Theodosius," my father ventured.

"Why, yes; the King, who has a wonderful memory for faces, was kind enough to remember, when he noticed me in the stalls, that I had had the honour to meet him on several occasions at the Court of Bavaria, at a time when he had never dreamed of his oriental throne—to which, as you know, he was summoned by a European Congress, and indeed had grave doubts about accepting the invitation, regarding that particular sovereignty as unworthy of his race, the noblest, heraldically speaking, in the whole of Europe. An aide-de-camp came down to bid me pay my respects to his Majesty, whose command I hastened, naturally, to obey."

"And I trust, you are satisfied with the results of his visit?"

"Enchanted! One was justified in feeling some apprehension as to the manner in which a Sovereign who is still so young would handle a situation requiring tact, particularly at this highly delicate juncture. For my own part, I reposed entire confidence in the King's political sense. But I must confess that he far surpassed my expectations. The speech that he made at the Elysée, which, according to information that has come to me from a most authoritative source, was composed, from beginning to end, by himself, was fully deserving of the interest that it has aroused in all quarters. It was simply masterly; a trifle daring, I quite admit, but with an audacity which, after all, has been fully justified by the event. Traditional diplomacy is all very well in its way, but in practice it has made his country and ours live in an hermetically sealed atmosphere in which it was no longer possible to breathe. Very well! There is one method of letting in fresh air, obviously not one of the methods which one could officially recommend, but one which King Theodosius might allow himself to adopt —and that is to break the windows. Which he accordingly did, with a spontaneous good humour that delighted everybody, and also with an aptness in his choice of words in which one could at once detect the race of scholarly princes from whom he is descended through his mother. There can be no question that when he spoke of the 'affinities' that bound his country to France, the expression, rarely as it may occur in the vocabulary of the Chancellories, was a singularly happy one. You see that literary ability is no drawback, even in diplomacy, even upon a throne," he went on, turning for a moment to myself. "The community of interests had long been apparent, I quite admit, and the relations of the two Powers were excellent. Still, it needed putting into words. The word was what we were all waiting for, it was chosen with marvellous aptitude; you have seen the effect it had. For my part, I must confess I applauded openly."

"Your friend M. de Vaugoubert will be pleased, after preparing for the agreement all these years."

"All the more so that his Majesty, who is quite incorrigible, really, in some ways, had taken care to spring it on him as a surprise. And it did come as a complete surprise, incidentally, to everyone concerned, beginning with the Foreign Minister himself, who—I have heard—did not find it at all to his liking. It appears that someone spoke to him about it and that he replied, pretty sharply, and loud enough to be overheard by the people on either side of them: 'I have been neither consulted nor informed!' indicating clearly by that that he declined to accept any responsibility for the consequences. I must own that the incident has given rise to a great deal of comment, and I should not go so far as to deny," he went on with a malicious smile, "that certain of my colleagues, for whom the supreme law appears to be that of inertia, may have been shaken from their habitual repose. As for Vaugoubert, you are aware that he has been bitterly attacked for his policy of bringing that country into closer relations with France, which must have been more than ordinarily painful to him, he is so sensitive, such an exquisite nature. I can amply testify to that, since, for all that he is considerably my junior, I have had many dealings with him, we are friends of long standing and I know him intimately. Besides, who could help knowing him? His is a heart of crystal. Indeed, that is the one fault that there is to be found with him; it is not necessary for the heart of a diplomat to be as transparent as all that. Still, that does not prevent their talking of sending him to Rome, which would be a fine rise for him, but a pretty big plum to swallow. Between ourselves, I fancy that Vaugoubert, utterly devoid of ambition as he is, would be very well pleased, and would by no means ask for that cup to pass from him. For all we know, he may do wonders down there; he is the chosen candidate of the Consulta, and for my part I can see him very well placed, with his artistic leanings, in the setting of the Farnese Palace and the Caracci Gallery. At least you would suppose that it was impossible for any one to hate him; but there is a whole camarilla collected round King Theodosius which is more or less held in fief by the Wilhelmstrasse, whose inspiration its members dutifully absorb, and these men have done everything in their power to checkmate him. Not only has Vaugoubert had to face these backstairs intrigues, he has had to endure also the insults of a gang of hireling pamphleteers who later on, being like every subsidised journalist the most arrant cowards, have been the first to cry quits, but in the interval had not shrunk from hurling at our Representative the most fatuous accusations that the wit of irresponsible fools could invent. For a month and more Vaugoubert's enemies had been dancing round him, howling for his scalp," M. de Norpois detached this word with sharp emphasis. "But forewarned is forearmed; as for their insults, he spurned them with his foot!" he went on with even more determination, and with so fierce a glare in his eye that for a moment we forgot our food. "In the words of a fine Arab proverb, 'The dogs may bark; the caravan goes on!' "

After launching this quotation M. de Norpois paused and examined our faces, to see what effect it had had upon us. Its effect was great, the proverb being familiar to us already. It had taken the place, that year, among people who 'really counted,' of "He who sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind," which was sorely in need of a rest, not having the perennial freshness of "Working for the King of Prussia." For the culture of these eminent men was an alternate, if not a tripartite and triennial culture. Of course, the use of quotations such as these, with which M. de Norpois excelled in jewelling his articles in the *Revue,* was in no way essential to their appearing solid and well-informed. Even without the ornament which the quotations supplied, it sufficed that M. de Norpois should write at a given point (as he never failed to write): "The Court of St. James's was not the last to be sensible of the peril," or "Feeling ran high on the Singers' Bridge, which with anxious eyes was following the selfish but skilful policy of the Dual Monarchy," or "A cry of alarm sounded from Montecitorio," or yet again, "That everlasting double-dealing which is so characteristic of the Ballplatz." By these expressions the profane reader had at once recognised and had paid deference to the diplomat *de carrière*. But what had made people say that he was something more than that, that he was endowed with a superior culture, had been his careful use of quotations, the perfect example of which, at that date, was still: "Give me a good policy and I will give you good finances, *to quote the favourite words of Baron Louis*": for we had not yet imported from the Far East: "Victory is on the side that can hold out a quarter of an hour longer than the other, *as the Japanese say.*" This reputation for immense literary gifts, combined with a positive genius for intrigue which he kept concealed beneath a mask of indifference, had secured the election of M. de Norpois to the Académie des Sciences Morales. And there were some who even thought that he would not be out of place in the Académie Française, on the famous day when, wishing to indicate that it was only by drawing the Russian Alliance closer that we could hope to arrive at an understanding with Great Britain, he had not hesitated to write: "Be it clearly understood in the Quai d'Orsay, be it taught henceforward in all the manuals of geography, which appear to be incomplete in this respect, be his certificate of graduation remorselessly withheld from every candidate who has not learned to say, 'If all roads lead to Rome, nevertheless the way from Paris to London runs of necessity through St. Petersburg.' "

"In short," M. de Norpois went on, addressing my father, "Vaugoubert has won himself considerable distinction from this affair, quite beyond anything on which he can have reckoned. He expected, you understand, a correctly worded speech (which, after the storm-clouds of recent years, would have been something to the good) but nothing more. Several persons who had the honour to be present have assured me that it is impossible, when one merely reads the speech, to form any conception of the effect that it produced when uttered—when articulated with marvellous clearness of diction by the King, who is a master of the art of public speaking and in that passage underlined every possible shade of meaning. I allowed myself, in this connexion, to listen to a little anecdote which brings into prominence once again that frank, boyish charm by which King Theodosius has won so many hearts. I am assured that, just as he uttered that word 'affinities,' which was, of course, the startling innovation of the speech, and one that, as you will see, will provoke discussion in the Chancelleries for years to come, his Majesty, anticipating the delight of our Ambassador, who was to find in that word the seal, the crown set upon all his labours, on his dreams, one might almost say, and, in a word, his marshal's baton, made a half turn towards Vaugoubert and fixing upon him his arresting gaze, so characteristic of the Oettingens, fired at him that admirably chosen word 'affinities,' a positive treasure-trove, uttering it in a tone which made it plain to all his hearers that it was employed of set purpose and with full knowledge of the circumstances. It appears that Vaugoubert found some difficulty in mastering his emotion, and I must confess that, to a certain extent, I can well understand it. Indeed, a person who is entirely to be believed has told me, in confidence, that the King came up to Vaugoubert after the dinner, when His Majesty was holding an informal court, and was heard to say, 'Well, are you satisfied with your pupil, my dear Marquis?'

"One thing, however," M. de Norpois concluded, "is certain; and that is that a speech like that has done more than twenty years of negotiation towards bringing the two countries together, uniting their 'affinities,' to borrow the picturesque expression of Theodosius II. It is no more than a word, if you like, but look what success it has had, how the whole of the European press is repeating it, what interest it has aroused, what a new note it has struck. Besides it is distinctly in the young Sovereign's manner. I will not go so far as to say that he lights upon a diamond of that water every day. But it is very seldom that, in his prepared speeches, or better still in the impulsive flow of his conversation, he does not reveal his character—I was on the point of saying 'does not affix his signature'—by the use of some incisive word. I myself am quite free from any suspicion of partiality in this respect, for I am stoutly opposed to all innovations in terminology. Nine times out of ten they are most dangerous."

"Yes, I was thinking, only the other day, that the German Emperor's telegram could not be much to your liking," said my father.

M. de Norpois raised his eyes to heaven, as who should say, "Oh, that fellow!" before he replied: "In the first place, it is an act of ingratitude. It is more than a crime; it is a blunder, and one of a crassness which I can describe only as pyramidal! Indeed, unless some one puts a check on his activities, the man who has got rid of Bismarck is quite capable of repudiating by degrees the whole of the Bismarckian policy; after which it will be a leap in the dark."

"My husband tells me, sir, that you are perhaps going to take him to Spain one summer; that will be nice for him; I am so glad."

"Why, yes; it is an idea that greatly attracts me; I amuse myself, planning a tour. I should like to go there with you, my dear fellow. But what about you, Madame; have you decided yet how you are going to spend your holidays?"

"I shall perhaps go with my son to Balbec, but I am not certain."

"Oh, but Balbec is quite charming, I was down that way a few years ago. They are beginning to build some very pretty little villas there; I think you'll like the place. But may I ask what has made you choose Balbec?"

"My son is very anxious to visit some of the churches in that neighbourhood, and Balbec church in particular. I was a little afraid that the tiring journey there, and the discomfort of staying in the place might be too much for him. But I hear that they have just opened an excellent hotel, in which he will be able to get all the comfort that he requires."

"Indeed! I must make a note of that, for a certain person who will not turn up her nose at a comfortable hotel."

"The church at Balbec is very beautiful, sir, is it not?" I inquired, repressing my sorrow at learning that one of the attractions of Balbec consisted in its pretty little villas.

"No, it is not bad; but it cannot be compared for a moment with such positive jewels in stone as the Cathedrals of Rheims and Chartres, or with what is to my mind the pearl among them all, the Sainte-Chapelle here in Paris."

"But, surely, Balbec church is partly romanesque, is it not?"

"Why, yes, it is in the romanesque style, which is to say very cold and lifeless, with no hint in it anywhere of the grace, the fantasy of the later gothic builders, who worked their stone as if it had been so much lace. Balbec church is well worth a visit, if you are in those parts; it is decidedly quaint; on a wet day, when you have nothing better to do, you might look inside; you will see the tomb of Tourville."

"Tell me, were you at the Foreign Ministry dinner last night?" asked my father. "I couldn't go."

"No," M. de Norpois smiled, "I must confess that I renounced it for a party of a very different sort. I was dining with a lady whose name you may possibly have heard, the beautiful Mme. Swann." My mother checked an impulsive movement, for, being more rapid in perception than my father, she used to alarm herself on his account over things which only began to upset him a moment later. Anything unpleasant that might occur to him was discovered first by her, just as bad news from France is always known abroad sooner than among ourselves. But she was curious to know what sort of people the Swanns managed to entertain, and so inquired of M. de Norpois as to whom he had met there.

"Why, my dear lady, it is a house which (or so it struck me) is especially attractive to gentlemen. There were several married men there last night, but their wives were all, as it happened, unwell, and so had not come with them," replied the Ambassador with a mordancy sheathed in good-humour, casting on each of us a glance the gentleness and discretion of which appeared to be tempering while in reality they deftly intensified its malice.

"In all fairness," he went on, "I must add that women do go to the house, but women who belong rather—what shall I say—to the Republican world than to Swann's" (he pronounced it "Svann's") "circle. Still, you can never tell. Perhaps it will turn into a political or a literary salon some day. Anyhow, they appear to be quite happy as they are. Indeed, I feel that Swann advertises his happiness just a trifle too blatantly. He told us the names of all the people who had asked him and his wife out for the next week, people with whom there was no particular reason to be proud of being intimate, with a want of reserve, of taste, almost of tact which I was astonished to remark in so refined a man. He kept on repeating, 'We haven't a free evening!' as though that had been a thing to boast of, positively like a *parvenu*, and he is certainly not that. For Swann had always plenty of friends, women as well as men, and without seeming over-bold, without the least wish to appear indiscreet, I think I may safely say that not all of them, of course, nor even the majority of them, but one at least, who is a lady of the very highest rank, would perhaps not have shewn herself inexorably averse from the idea of entering upon relations with Mme. Swann, in which case it is safe to assume that more than one sheep of the social flock would have followed her lead. But it seems that there has been no indication on Swann's part of any movement in that direction.

"What do I see? A Nesselrode pudding! As well! I declare, I shall need a course at Carlsbad after such a Lucullus-feast as this.

"Possibly Swann felt that there would be too much resistance to overcome. The marriage—so much is certain—was not well received. There has been some talk of his wife's having money, but that is all humbug. Anyhow, the whole affair has been looked upon with disfavour. And then, Swann has an aunt who is excessively rich and in an admirable position socially, married to a man who, financially speaking, is a power. Not only has she refused to meet Mme. Swann, she has actually started a campaign to force her friends and acquaintances to do the same. I do not mean to say that anyone who moves in a good circle in Paris has shewn any actual incivility to Mme. Swann. . . . No! A hundred times no! Quite apart from her husband's being eminently a man to take up the challenge. Anyhow, there is one curious thing about it, to see the immense importance that Swann, who knows so many and such exclusive people, attaches to a society of which the best that can be said is that it is extremely mixed. I myself, who knew him in the old days, must admit that I felt more astonished than amused at seeing a man so well-bred as he is, so much at home in the best houses, effusively thanking the Chief Secretary to the Minister of Posts for having come to them, and asking him whether Mme. Swann might *take the liberty* of calling upon his wife. He must feel something of an exile, don't you know; evidently, it's quite a different world. I don't think, all the same, that Swann is unhappy. It is true that for some years before the marriage she was always trying to blackmail him in a rather disgraceful way; she would take the child away whenever Swann refused her anything. Poor Swann, who is as unsophisticated as he is, for all that, sharp, believed every time that the child's disappearance was a coincidence, and declined to face the facts. Apart from that, she made such continual scenes that everyone expected that, from the day she attained her object and was safely married, nothing could possibly restrain her and that their life would be a hell on earth. Instead of which, just the opposite has happened. People are inclined to laugh at the way in which Swann speaks of his wife; it's become a standing joke. Of course, one could hardly expect that, conscious, more or less of being a—(you remember Molière's line) he would go and proclaim it *urbi et orbi;* still that does not prevent one from finding a tendency in him to exaggerate when he declares that she makes an excellent wife. And yet that is not so far from the truth as people imagine. In her own way—which is not, perhaps, what all husbands would prefer, but then, between you and me, I find it difficult to believe that Swann, who has known her for ever so long and is far from being an utter fool, did not know what to expect—there can be no denying that she does seem to have a certain regard for him. I do not say that she is not flighty, and Swann himself has no fault to find with her for that, if one is to believe the charitable tongues which, as you may suppose, continue to wag. But she is distinctly grateful to him for what he has done for her, and, despite the fears that were everywhere expressed of the contrary, her temper seems to have become angelic."

This alteration was perhaps not so extraordinary as M. de Norpois professed to find it. Odette had not believed that Swann would ever consent to marry her; each time that she made the suggestive announcement that some man about town had just married his mistress she had seen him stiffen into a glacial silence, or at the most, if she were directly to challenge him, asking: "Don't you think it very nice, a very fine thing that he has done, for a woman who sacrificed all her youth to him?" had heard him answer dryly: "But I don't say that there's anything wrong in it. Everyone does what he himself thinks right." She came very near, indeed, to believing that (as he used to threaten in moments of anger) he was going to leave her altogether, for she had heard it said, not long since, by a woman sculptor, that "You cannot be surprised at anything men do, they're such brutes," and impressed by the profundity of this maxim of pessimism she had appropriated it for herself, and repeated it on every possible occasion with an air of disappointment which seemed to imply: "After all, it's not impossible in any way; it would be just my luck." Meanwhile all the virtue had gone from the optimistic maxim which had hitherto guided Odette through life: "You can do anything with men when they're in love with you, they're such idiots!" a doctrine which was expressed on her face by the same tremor of an eyelid that might have accompanied such words as: "Don't be frightened; he won't break anything." While she waited, Odette was tormented by the thought of what one of her friends, who had been married by a man who had not lived with her for nearly so long as Odette herself had lived with Swann, and had had no child by him, and who was now in a definitely respectable position, invited to the balls at the Elysée and so forth, must think of Swann's behaviour. A consultant more discerning than M. de Norpois would doubtless have been able to diagnose that it was this feeling of shame and humiliation that had embittered Odette, that the devilish characteristics which she displayed were no essential part of her, no irremediable evil, and so would easily have foretold what had indeed come to pass, namely that a new rule of life, the matrimonial, would put an end, with almost magic swiftness, to these painful incidents, of daily occurrence but in no sense organic. Practically everyone was surprised at the marriage, and this, in itself, is surprising. No doubt very few people understand the purely subjective nature of the phenomenon that we call love, or how it creates, so to speak, a fresh, a third, a supplementary person, distinct from the person whom the world knows by the same name, a person most of whose constituent elements are derived from ourself, the lover. And so there are very few who can regard as natural the enormous proportions that a creature comes to assume in our eyes who is not the same as the creature that they see. It would appear, none the less, that so far as Odette was concerned people might have taken into account the fact that if, indeed, she had never entirely understood Swann's mentality, at least she was acquainted with the titles, and with all the details of his studies, so much so that the name of Vermeer was as familiar to her as that of her own dressmaker; while as for Swann himself she knew intimately those traits of character of which the rest of the world must remain ignorant or merely laugh at them, and only a mistress or a sister may gain possession of the revealing, cherished image; and so strongly are we attached to such eccentricities, even to those of them which we are most anxious to correct, that it is because a woman comes in time to acquire an indulgent, an affectionately mocking familiarity, such as we ourselves have with them, or our relatives have, that amours of long standing have something of the sweetness and strength of family affection. The bonds that unite us to another creature receive their consecration when that creature adopts the same point of view as ourself in judging one of our imperfections. And among these special traits there were others, besides, which belonged as much to his intellect as to his character, which, all the same, because they had their roots in the latter, Odette had been able more easily to discern. She complained that when Swann turned author, when he published his essays, these characteristics were not to be found in them as they were in his letters, or in his conversation, where they abounded. She urged him to give them a more prominent place. She would have liked that because it was these things that she herself preferred in him, but since she preferred them because they were the things most typical of himself, she was perhaps not wrong in wishing that they might be found in his writings. Perhaps also she thought that his work, if endowed with more vitality, so that it ultimately brought him success, might enable her also to form what at the Verdurins' she had been taught to value above everything else in the world—a salon.

Among the people to whom this sort of marriage appeared ridiculous, people who in their own case would ask themselves, "What will M. de Guermantes think, what will Bréauté say when I marry Mlle. de Montmorency?", among the people who cherished that sort of social ideal would have figured, twenty years earlier, Swann himself, the Swann who had taken endless pains to get himself elected to the Jockey Club, and had reckoned at that time on making a brilliant marriage which, by consolidating his position, would have made him one of the most conspicuous figures in Paris. Only, the visions which a marriage like that suggests to the mind of the interested party need, like all visions, if they are not to fade away and be altogether lost, to receive sustenance from without. Your most ardent longing is to humiliate the man who has insulted you. But if you never hear of him again, having removed to some other place, your enemy will come to have no longer the slightest importance for you. If one has lost sight for a score of years of all the people on whose account one would have liked to be elected to the Jockey Club or the Institute, the prospect of becoming a member of one or other of those corporations will have ceased to tempt one. Now fully as much as retirement, ill-health or religious conversion, protracted relations with a woman will substitute fresh visions for the old. There was not on Swann's part, when he married Odette, any renunciation of his social ambitions, for from these ambitions Odette had long ago, in the spiritual sense of the word, detached him. Besides, had he not been so detached, his marriage would have been all the more creditable. It is because they imply the sacrifice of a more or less advantageous position to a purely private happiness that, as a general rule, 'impossible' marriages are the happiest of all. (One cannot very well include among the 'impossible' marriages those that are made for money, there being no instance on record of a couple, of whom the wife or even the husband has thus sold himself, who have not sooner or later been admitted into society, if only by tradition, and on the strength of so many precedents, and so as not to have two conflicting standards.) Perhaps, on the other hand, the artistic, if not the perverse side of Swann's nature would in any event have derived a certain amount of pleasure from coupling with himself, in one of those crossings of species such as Mendelians practise and mythology records, a creature of a different race, archduchess or prostitute, from contracting a royal alliance or from marrying beneath him. There had been but one person in all the world whose opinion he took into consideration whenever he thought of his possible marriage with Odette; that was, and from no snobbish motive, the Duchesse de Guermantes. With whom Odette, on the contrary, was but little concerned, thinking only of those people whose position was immediately above her own, rather than in so vague an empyrean. But when Swann in his daydreams saw Odette as already his wife he invariably formed a picture of the moment in which he would take her—her, and above all her daughter—to call upon the Princesse des Laumes (who was shortly, on the death of her father-in-law, to become Duchesse de Guermantes). He had no desire to introduce them anywhere else, but his heart would soften as he invented—uttering their actual words to himself—all the things that the Duchess would say of him to Odette, and Odette to the Duchess, the affection that she would shew for Gilberte, spoiling her, making him proud of his child. He enacted to himself the scene of this introduction with the same precision in each of its imaginary details that people shew when they consider how they would spend, supposing they were to win it, a lottery prize the amount of which they have arbitrarily determined. In so far as a mental picture which accompanies one of our resolutions may be said to be its motive, so it might be said that if Swann married Odette it was in order to present her and Gilberte, without anyone's else being present, without, if need be, anyone's else ever coming to know of it, to the Duchesse de Guermantes. We shall see how this sole social ambition that he had entertained for his wife and daughter was precisely that one the realisation of which proved to be forbidden him by a veto so absolute that Swann died in the belief that the Duchess would never possibly come to know them. We shall see also that, on the contrary, the Duchesse de Guermantes did associate with Odette and Gilberte after the death of Swann. And doubtless he would have been wiser —seeing that he could attach so much importance to so small a matter— not to have formed too dark a picture of the future, in this connexion, but to have consoled himself with the hope that the meeting of the ladies might indeed take place when he was no longer there to enjoy it. The laborious process of causation which sooner or later will bring about every possible effect, including (consequently) those which one had believed to be most nearly impossible, naturally slow at times, is rendered slower still by our impatience (which in seeking to accelerate only obstructs it) and by our very existence, and comes to fruition only when we have ceased to desire it—have ceased, possibly, to live. Was not Swann conscious of this from his own experience, had there not been already, in his life, as it were a prefiguration of what was to happen after his death, a posthumous happiness in this marriage with this Odette whom he had passionately loved—even if she had not been pleasing to him at first sight—whom he had married when he no longer loved her, when the creature that, in Swann, had so longed to live, had so despaired of living all its life in company with Odette, when that creature was extinct?

I began next to speak of the Comte de Paris, to ask whether he was not one of Swann's friends, for I was afraid lest the conversation should drift away from him. "Why, yes!" replied M. de Norpois, turning towards me and fixing upon my modest person the azure gaze in which floated, as in their vital element, his immense capacity for work and his power of assimilation. And "Upon my word," he added, once more addressing my father, "I do not think that I shall be overstepping the bounds of the respect which I have always professed for the Prince (although without, you understand, maintaining any personal relations with him, which would inevitably compromise my position, unofficial as that may be), if I tell you of a little episode which is not without point; no more than four years ago, at a small railway station in one of the countries of Central Europe, the Prince happened to set eyes on Mme. Swann. Naturally, none of his circle ventured to ask his Royal Highness what he thought of her. That would not have been seemly. But when her name came up by chance in conversation, by certain signs—imperceptible, if you like, but quite unmistakable—the Prince appeared willing enough to let it be understood that his impression of her had, in a word, been far from unfavourable."

"But there could have been no possibility, surely, of her being presented to the Comte de Paris?" inquired my father.

"Well, we don't know; with Princes one never does know," replied M. de Norpois. "The most exalted, those who know best how to secure what is due to them, are as often as not the last to let themselves be embarrassed by the decrees of popular opinion, even by those for which there is most justification, especially when it is a question of their rewarding a personal attachment to themselves. Now it is certain that the Comte de Paris has always most graciously recognised the devotion of Swann, who is, for that matter, a man of character, in spite of it all."

"And what was your own impression, your Excellency? Do tell us!" my mother asked, from politeness as well as from curiosity.

All the energy of the old connoisseur broke through the habitual moderation of his speech as he answered: "Quite excellent!"

And knowing that the admission that a strong impression has been made on one by a woman takes its place, provided that one makes it in a playful tone, in a certain category of the art of conversation that is highly appreciated, he broke into a little laugh that lasted for several seconds, moistening the old diplomat's blue eyes and making his nostrils, with their network of tiny scarlet veins, quiver. "She is altogether charming!"

"Was there a writer of the name of Bergotte at this dinner, sir?" I asked timidly, still trying to keep the conversation to the subject of the Swanns.

"Yes, Bergotte was there," replied M. de Norpois, inclining his head courteously towards me, as though in his desire to be pleasant to my father he attached to everything connected with him a real importance, even to the questions of a boy of my age who was not accustomed to see such politeness shewn to him by persons of his. "Do you know him?" he went on, fastening on me that clear gaze, the penetration of which had won the praise of Bismarck.

"My son does not know him, but he admires his work immensely," my mother explained.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed M. de Norpois, inspiring me with doubts of my own intelligence far more serious than those that ordinarily distracted me, when I saw that what I valued a thousand thousand times more than myself, what I regarded as the most exalted thing in the world, was for him at the very foot of the scale of admiration. "I do not share your son's point of view. Bergotte is what I call a flute-player: one must admit that he plays on it very agreeably, although with a great deal of mannerism, of affectation. But when all is said, it is no more than that, and that is nothing very great. Nowhere does one find in his enervated writings anything that could be called construction. No action—or very little—but above all no range. His books fail at the foundation, or rather they have no foundation at all. At a time like the present, when the ever-increasing complexity of life leaves one scarcely a moment for reading, when the map of Europe has undergone radical alterations, and is on the eve, very probably, of undergoing others more drastic still, when so many new and threatening problems are arising on every side, you will allow me to suggest that one is entitled to ask that a writer should be something else than a fine intellect which makes us forget, amid otiose and byzantine discussions of the merits of pure form, that we may be overwhelmed at any moment by a double tide of barbarians, those from without and those from within our borders. I am aware that this is a blasphemy against the sacrosanct school of what these gentlemen term 'Art for Art's sake,' but at this period of history there are tasks more urgent than the manipulation of words in a harmonious manner. Not that Bergotte's manner is not now and then quite attractive. I have no fault to find with that, but taken as a whole, it is all very precious, very thin, and has very little virility. I can now understand more easily, when I bear in mind your altogether excessive regard for Bergotte, the few lines that you shewed me just now, which it would have been unfair to you not to overlook, since you yourself told me, in all simplicity, that they were merely a childish scribbling." (I had, indeed, said so, but I did not think anything of the sort.) "For every sin there is forgiveness, and especially for the sins of youth. After all, others as well as yourself have such sins upon their conscience, and you are not the only one who has believed himself to be a poet in his day. But one can see in what you have shewn me the evil influence of Bergotte. You will not, of course, be surprised when I say that there was in it none of his good qualities, since he is a past-master in the art—incidentally quite superficial—of handling a certain style of which, at your age, you cannot have acquired even the rudiments. But already there is the same fault, that paradox of stringing together fine-sounding words and only afterwards troubling about what they mean. That is putting the cart before the horse, even in Bergotte's books. All those Chinese puzzles of form, all these deliquescent mandarin subtleties seem to me to be quite futile. Given a few fireworks, let off prettily enough by an author, and up goes the shout of genius. Works of genius are not so common as all that! Bergotte cannot place to his credit—does not carry in his baggage, if I may use the expression—a single novel that is at all lofty in its conception, any of those books which one keeps in a special corner of one's library. I do not discover one such in the whole of his work. But that does not exclude the fact that, with him, the work is infinitely superior to the author. Ah! there is a man who justifies the wit who insisted that one ought never to know an author except through his books. It would be impossible to imagine an individual who corresponded less to his—more pretentious, more pompous, less fitted for human society. Vulgar at some moments, at others talking like a book, and not even like one of his own, but like a boring book, which his, to do them justice, are not—such is your Bergotte. He has the most confused mind, alembicated, what our ancestors called a *diseur de phébus,* and he makes the things that he says even more unpleasant by the manner in which he says them. I forget for the moment whether it is Loménie or Sainte-Beuve who tells us that Vigny repelled people by the same eccentricity. But Bergotte has never given us a *Cinq-Mars,* or a *Cachet Rouge,* certain pages of which are regular anthology pieces."

Paralysed by what M. de Norpois had just said to me with regard to the fragment which I had submitted to him, and remembering at the same time the difficulties that I experienced when I attempted to write an essay or merely to devote myself to serious thought, I felt conscious once again of my intellectual nullity and that I was not born for a literary life. Doubtless in the old days at Combray certain impressions of a very humble order, or a few pages of Bergotte used to plunge me into a state of musing which had appeared to me to be of great value. But this state was what my poem in prose reflected; there could be no doubt that M. de Norpois had at once grasped and had seen through the fallacy of what I had discovered to be beautiful simply by a mirage that must be entirely false since the Ambassador had not been taken in by it. He had shewn me, on the other hand, what an infinitely unimportant place was mine when I was judged from outside, objectively, by the best-disposed and most intelligent of experts. I felt myself to be struck speechless, overwhelmed; and my mind, like a fluid which is without dimensions save those of the vessel that is provided for it, just as it had been expanded a moment ago so as to fill all the vast capacity of genius, contracted now, was entirely contained in the straitened mediocrity in which M. de Norpois had of a sudden enclosed and sealed it.

"Our first introduction—I speak of Bergotte and myself——" he resumed, turning to my father, "was somewhat beset with thorns (which is, after all, only another way of saying that it was not lacking in points). Bergotte—some years ago, now—paid a visit to Vienna while I was Ambassador there; he was presented to me by the Princess Metternich, came and wrote his name, and expected to be asked to the Embassy. Now, being in a foreign country as the Representative of France, to which he has after all done some honour by his writings, to a certain extent (let us say, to be quite accurate, to a very slight extent), I was prepared to set aside the unfavourable opinion that I hold of his private life. But he was not travelling alone, and he actually let it be understood that he was not to be invited without his companion. I trust that I am no more of a prude than most men, and, being a bachelor, I was perhaps in a position to throw open the doors of the Embassy a little wider than if I had been married and the father of a family. Nevertheless, I must admit that there are depths of degradation to which I should hesitate to descend, while these are rendered more repulsive still by the tone, not moral, merely—let us be quite frank and say moralising,—that Bergotte takes up in his books, where one finds nothing but perpetual and, between ourselves, somewhat wearisome analyses, torturing scruples, morbid remorse, and all for the merest peccadilloes, the most trivial naughtinesses (as one knows from one's own experience), while all the time he is shewing such an utter lack of conscience and so much cynicism in his private life. To cut a long story short, I evaded the responsibility, the Princess returned to the charge, but without success. So that I do not suppose that I appear exactly in the odour of sanctity to the gentleman, and I am not sure how far he appreciated Swann's kindness in inviting him and myself on the same evening. Unless of course it was he who asked for the invitation. One can never tell, for really he is not normal. Indeed that is his sole excuse."

"And was Mme. Swann's daughter at the dinner?" I asked M. de Norpois, taking advantage, to put this question, of a moment in which, as we all moved towards the drawing-room, I could more easily conceal my emotion than would have been possible at table, where I was held fast in the glare of the lamplight.

M. de Norpois appeared to be trying for a moment to remember; then: "Yes, you mean a young person of fourteen or fifteen? Yes, of course, I remember now that she was introduced to me before dinner as the daughter of our Amphitryon. I may tell you that I saw but little of her; she retired to bed early. Or else she went out to see a friend—I forget. But I can see that you are very intimate with the Swann household."

"I play with Mlle. Swann in the Champs-Elysées, and she is delightful."

"Oh! so that is it, is it? But I assure you, I thought her charming. I must confess to you, however, that I do not believe that she will ever be anything like her mother, if I may say as much without wounding you in a vital spot."

"I prefer Mlle. Swann's face, but I admire her mother, too, enormously; I go for walks in the Bois simply in the hope of seeing her pass."

"Ah! But I must tell them that; they will be highly flattered."

While he was uttering these words, and for a few seconds after he had uttered them, M. de Norpois was still in the same position as anyone else who, hearing me speak of Swann as an intelligent man, of his family as respectable stockbrokers, of his house as a fine house, imagined that I would speak just as readily of another man equally intelligent, of other stockbrokers equally respectable, of another house equally fine; it was the moment in which a sane man who is talking to a lunatic has not yet perceived that his companion is mad. M. de Norpois knew that there was nothing unnatural in the pleasure which one derived from looking at pretty women, that it was a social convention, when anyone spoke to you of a pretty woman with any fervour, to pretend to think that he was in love with her, and to promise to further his designs. But in saying that he would speak of me to Gilberte and her mother (which would enable me, like an Olympian deity who has taken on the fluidity of a breath of wind, or rather the aspect of the old greybeard whose form Minerva borrows, to penetrate, myself, unseen, into Mme. Swann's drawing-room, to attract her attention, to occupy her thoughts, to arouse her gratitude for my admiration, to appear before her as the friend of an important person, to seem to her worthy to be invited by her in the future and to enter into the intimate life of her family), this important person who was going to make use, in my interests, of the great influence which he must have with Mme. Swann inspired in me suddenly an affection so compelling that I had difficulty in restraining myself from kissing his gentle hands, white and crumpled, which looked as though they had been left lying too long in water. I even sketched in the air an outline of that impulsive movement, but this I supposed that I alone had observed. For it is difficult for any of us to calculate exactly on what scale his words or his gestures are apparent to others. Partly from the fear of exaggerating our own importance, and also because we enlarge to enormous proportions the field over which the impressions formed by other people in the course of their lives are obliged to extend, we imagine that the accessories of our speech and attitudes scarcely penetrate the consciousness, still less remain in the memory of those with whom we converse. It is, we may suppose, to a prompting of this sort that criminals yield when they 'touch up' the wording of a statement already made, thinking that the new variant cannot be confronted with any existing version. But it is quite possible that, even in what concerns the millennial existence of the human race, the philosophy of the journalist, according to which everything is destined to oblivion, is less true than a contrary philosophy which would predict the conservation of everything. In the same newspaper in which the moralist of the 'Paris column' says to us of an event, of a work of art, all the more forcibly of a singer who has enjoyed her 'crowded hour': "Who will remember this in ten years' time?" overleaf does not the report of the Académie des Inscriptions speak often of a fact, in itself of smaller importance, of a poem of little merit, which dates from the epoch of the Pharaohs and is now known again in its entirety? Is it not, perhaps, just the same in our brief life on earth? And yet, some years later, in a house in which M. de Norpois, who was also calling there, had seemed to me the most solid support that I could hope to find, because he was the friend of my father, indulgent, inclined to wish us all well, and besides, by his profession and upbringing, trained to discretion, when, after the Ambassador had gone, I was told that he had alluded to an evening long ago when he had seen the moment in which I was just going to kiss his hands, not only did I colour up to the roots of my hair but I was stupefied to learn how different from all that I had believed were not only the manner in which M. de Norpois spoke of me but also the constituents of his memory: this tittle-tattle enlightened me as to the incalculable proportions of absence and presence of mind, of recollection and forgetfulness which go to form the human intelligence; and I was as marvellously surprised as on the day on which I read for the first time, in one of Maspero's books, that we had an exact list of the sportsmen whom Assurbanipal used to invite to his hunts, a thousand years before the Birth of Christ.

"Oh, sir," I assured M. de Norpois, when he told me that he would inform Gilberte and her mother how much I admired them, "if you would do that, if you would speak of me to Mme. Swann, my whole life would not be long enough for me to prove my gratitude, and that life would be all at your service. But I feel bound to point out to you that I do not know Mme. Swann, and that I have never been introduced to her."

I had added these last words from a scruple of conscience, and so as not to appear to be boasting of an acquaintance which I did not possess. But while I was uttering them I felt that they were already superfluous, for from the beginning of my speech of thanks, with its chilling ardour, I had seen flitting across the face of the Ambassador an expression of hesitation and dissatisfaction, and in his eyes that vertical, narrow, slanting look (like, in the drawing of a solid body in perspective, the receding line of one of its surfaces), that look which one addresses to the invisible audience whom one has within oneself at the moment when one is saying something that one's other audience, the person whom one has been addressing—myself, in this instance—is not meant to hear. I realised in a flash that these phrases which I had pronounced, which, feeble as they were when measured against the flood of gratitude that was coursing through me, had seemed to me bound to touch M. de Norpois and to confirm his decision upon an intervention which would have given him so little trouble and me so much joy, were perhaps (out of all those that could have been chosen, with diabolical malice, by persons anxious to do me harm) the only ones that could result in making him abandon his intention. Indeed, when he heard me speak, just as at the moment when a stranger with whom we have been exchanging—quite pleasantly—our impressions, which we might suppose to be similar to his, of the passers-by, whom we have agreed in regarding as vulgar, reveals suddenly the pathological abyss that divides him from us by adding carelessly, as he runs his hand over his pocket: "What a pity, I haven't got my revolver here; I could have picked off the lot!" M. de Norpois, who knew that nothing was less costly or more easy than to be commended to Mme. Swann and taken to her house, and saw that to me, on the contrary, such favours bore so high a price and were consequently, no doubt, of great difficulty, thought that the desire, apparently normal, which I had expressed must cloak some different thought, some suspect intention, some pre-existent fault, on account of which, in the certainty of displeasing Mme. Swann, no one hitherto had been willing to undertake the responsibility for conveying a message to her from me. And I understood that this office was one which he would never discharge, that he might see Mme. Swann daily, for years to come, without ever mentioning my name. He did indeed ask her, a few days later, for some information which I required, and charged my father to convey it to me. But he had not thought it his duty to tell her at whose instance he was inquiring. So she would never discover that I knew M. de Norpois and that I hoped so greatly to be asked to her house; and this was perhaps a less misfortune than I supposed. For the second of these discoveries would probably not have added much to the efficacy, in any event uncertain, of the first. In Odette the idea of her own life and of her home awakened no mysterious disturbance; a person who knew her, who came to see her, did not seem to her a fabulous creature such as he seemed to me who would have flung a stone through Swann's windows if I could have written upon it that I knew M. de Norpois; I was convinced that such a message, even when transmitted in so brutal a fashion, would have done far more to exalt me in the eyes of the lady of the house than it would have prejudiced her against me. But even if I had been capable of understanding that the mission which M. de Norpois did not perform must have remained futile, nay, more than that, might even have damaged my credit with the Swanns, I should not have had the courage, had he shewn himself consenting, to release the Ambassador from it, and to renounce the pleasure—however fatal its consequences might prove—of feeling that my name and my person were thus brought for a moment into Gilberte's presence, in her unknown life and home.

After M. de Norpois had gone my father cast an eye over the evening paper; I dreamed once more of Berma. The pleasure which I had found in listening to her required to be made complete, all the more because it had fallen far short of what I had promised myself; and so it at once assimilated everything that was capable of giving it nourishment, those merits, for instance, which M. de Norpois had admitted that Berma possessed, and which my mind had absorbed at one draught, like a dry lawn when water is poured on it. Then my father handed me the newspaper, pointing me out a paragraph which ran more or less as follows:—

> The performance of *Phèdre,* given this afternoon before an enthusiastic audience, which included the foremost representatives of society and the arts, as well as the principal critics, was for Mme. Berma, who played the heroine, the occasion of a triumph as brilliant as any that she has known in the course of her phenomenal career. We shall discuss more fully in a later issue this performance, which is indeed an event in the history of the stage; for the present we need only add that the best qualified judges are unanimous in the pronouncement that such an interpretation sheds an entirely new light on the part of Phèdre, which is one of the finest and most studied of Racine's creations, and that it constitutes the purest and most exalted manifestation of dramatic art which it has been the privilege of our generation to witness.

Immediately my mind had conceived this new idea of "the purest and most exalted manifestation of dramatic art," it, the idea, sped to join the imperfect pleasure which I had felt in the theatre, added to it a little of what was lacking, and their combination formed something so exalting that I cried out within myself: "What a great artist!" It may doubtless be argued that I was not absolutely sincere. But let us bear in mind, rather, the numberless writers who, dissatisfied with the page which they have just written, if they read some eulogy of the genius of Chateaubriand, or evoke the spirit of some great artist whose equal they aspire to be, by humming to themselves, for instance, a phrase of Beethoven, the melancholy of which they compare with what they have been trying to express in prose, are so filled with that idea of genius that they add it to their own productions, when they think of them once again, see them no longer in the light in which at first they appeared, and, hazarding an act of faith in the value of their work, say to themselves: "After all!" without taking into account that, into the total which determines their ultimate satisfaction, they have introduced the memory of marvellous pages of Chateaubriand which they assimilate to their own, but of which, in cold fact, they are not the authors; let us bear in mind the numberless men who believe in the love of a mistress on the evidence only of her betrayals; all those, too, who are sustained by the alternative hopes, either of an incomprehensible survival of death, when they think, inconsolable husbands, of the wives whom they have lost but have not ceased to love, or, artists, of the posthumous glory which they may thus enjoy; or else the hope of complete extinction which comforts them when their thoughts turn to the misdeeds that otherwise they must expiate after death; let us bear in mind also the travellers who come home enraptured by the general beauty of a tour of which, from day to day, they have felt nothing but the tedious incidents; and let us then declare whether, in the communal life that is led by our ideas in the enclosure of our minds, there is a single one of those that make us most happy which has not first sought, a very parasite, and won from an alien but neighbouring idea the greater part of the strength that it originally lacked.

My mother appeared none too well pleased that my father no longer thought of 'the career' for myself. I fancy that, anxious before all things that a definite rule of life should discipline the eccentricity of my nervous system, what she regretted was not so much seeing me abandon diplomacy as the prospect of my devoting myself to literature. But "Let him alone!" my father protested; "the main thing is that a man should find pleasure in his work. He is no longer a child. He knows pretty well now what he likes, it is not at all probable that he will change, and he is quite capable of deciding for himself what will make him happy in life." That evening, as I waited for the time to arrive when, thanks to the freedom of choice which they allowed me, I should or should not begin to be happy in life, my father's words caused me great uneasiness. At all times his unexpected kindnesses had, when they were manifested, prompted in me so keen a desire to kiss, above where his beard began, his glowing cheeks, that if I did not yield to that desire, it was simply because I was afraid of annoying him. And on that day, as an author becomes alarmed when he sees the fruits of his own meditation, which do not appear to him to be of great value since he does not separate them from himself, oblige a publisher to choose a kind of paper, to employ a fount of type finer, perhaps, than they deserve, I asked myself whether my desire to write was of sufficient importance to justify my father in dispensing so much generosity. But apart from that, when he spoke of my inclinations as no longer liable to change, he awakened in me two terrible suspicions. The first was that (at a time when, every day, I regarded myself as standing upon the threshold of a life which was still intact and would not enter upon its course until the following morning) my existence was already begun, and that, furthermore, what was yet to follow would not differ to any extent from what had already elapsed. The second suspicion, which was nothing more, really, than a variant of the first, was that I was not situated somewhere outside the realm of Time, but was subject to its laws, just like the people in novels who, for that reason, used to plunge me in such depression when I read of their lives, down at Combray, in the fastness of my wicker sentry-box. In theory one is aware that the earth revolves, but in practice one does not perceive it, the ground upon which one treads seems not to move, and one can live undisturbed. So it is with Time in one's life. And to make its flight perceptible novelists are obliged, by wildly accelerating the beat of the pendulum, to transport the reader in a couple of minutes over ten, or twenty, or even thirty years. At the top of one page we have left a lover full of hope; at the foot of the next we meet him again, a bowed old man of eighty, painfully dragging himself on his daily walk about the courtyard of an almshouse, scarcely replying to what is said to him, oblivious of the past. In saying of me, "He is no longer a child," "His tastes will not change now," and so forth, my father had suddenly made me apparent to myself in my position in Time, and caused me the same kind of depression as if I had been, not yet the enfeebled old pensioner, but one of those heroes of whom the author, in a tone of indifference which is particularly galling, says to us at the end of a book: "He very seldom comes up now from the country. He has finally decided to end his days there."

Meanwhile my father, so as to forestall any criticism that we might feel tempted to make of our guest, said to my mother: "Upon my word, old Norpois was rather 'typical,' as you call it, this evening, wasn't he? When he said that it would not have been 'seemly' to ask the Comte de Paris a question, I was quite afraid you would burst out laughing."

"Not at all!" answered my mother. "I was delighted to see a man of his standing, and age too, keep that sort of simplicity, which is really a sign of straightforwardness and good-breeding."

"I should think so, indeed! That does not prevent his having a shrewd and discerning mind; I know him well, I see him at the Commission, remember, where he is very different from what he was here," exclaimed my father, who was glad to see that Mamma appreciated M. de Norpois, and anxious to persuade her that he was even superior to what she supposed, because a cordial nature exaggerates a friend's qualities with as much pleasure as a mischievous one finds in depreciating them. "What was it that he said, again—'With Princes one never does know.' . . . ?"

"Yes, that was it. I noticed it at the time; it was very neat. You can see that he has a vast experience of life."

"The astonishing thing is that he should have been dining with the Swanns, and that he seems to have found quite respectable people there, officials even. How on earth can Mme. Swann have managed to catch them?"

"Did you notice the malicious way he said: 'It is a house which is especially attractive to gentlemen!'?"

And each of them attempted to reproduce the manner in which M. de Norpois had uttered these words, as they might have attempted to capture some intonation of Bressant's voice or of Thiron's in *L'Aventurière* or in the *Gendre de M. Poirier*. But of all his sayings there was none so keenly relished as one was by Françoise, who, years afterwards, even, could not 'keep a straight face' if we reminded her that she had been qualified by the Ambassador as 'a chef of the first order,' a compliment which my mother had gone in person to transmit to her, as a War Minister publishes the congratulations addressed to him by a visiting Sovereign after the grand review. I, as it happened, had preceded my mother to the kitchen. For I had extorted from Françoise, who though opposed to war was cruel, that she would cause no undue suffering to the rabbit which she had to kill, and I had had no report yet of its death. Françoise assured me that it had passed away as peacefully as could be desired, and very swiftly. "I have never seen a beast like it; it died without uttering a word; you would have thought it was dumb." Being but little versed in the language of beasts I suggested that the rabbit had not, perhaps, a cry like the chicken's. "Just wait till you see," said Françoise, filled with contempt for my ignorance, "if rabbits don't cry every bit as much as chickens. Why, they are far noisier." She received the compliments of M. de Norpois with the proud simplicity, the joyful and (if but for the moment) intelligent expression of an artist when someone speaks to him of his art. My mother had sent her when she first came to us to several of the big restaurants to see how the cooking there was done. I had the same pleasure, that evening, in hearing her dismiss the most famous of them as mere cookshops that I had had long ago, when I learned with regard to theatrical artists that the hierarchy of their merits did not at all correspond to that of their reputations. "The Ambassador," my mother told her, "assured me that he knows no place where he can get cold beef and *soufflés* as good as yours." Françoise, with an air of modesty and of paying just homage to the truth, agreed, but seemed not at all impressed by the title 'Ambassador'; she said of M. de Norpois, with the friendliness due to a man who had taken her for a chef: "He's a good old soul, like me." She had indeed hoped to catch sight of him as he arrived, but knowing that Mamma hated their standing about behind doors and in windows, and thinking that Mamma would get to know from the other servants or from the porter that she had been keeping watch (for Françoise saw everywhere nothing but 'jealousies' and 'tale-bearings,' which played the same grim and unending part in her imagination as do for others of us the intrigues of the Jesuits or the Jews), she had contented herself with a peep from the kitchen window, 'so as not to have words with Madame,' and beneath the momentary aspect of M. de Norpois had 'thought it was Monsieur Legrand,' because of what she called his 'agelity' and in spite of their having not a single point in common. "Well," inquired my mother, "and how do you explain that nobody else can make a jelly as well as you—when you choose?" "I really couldn't say how that becomes about," replied Françoise, who had established no very clear line of demarcation between the verb 'to come,' in certain of its meanings at least, and the verb 'to become.' She was speaking the truth, if not the whole truth, being scarcely more capable—or desirous—of revealing the mystery which ensured the superiority of her jellies or her creams than a leader of fashion the secrets of her toilet or a great singer those of her song. Their explanations tell us little; it was the same with the recipes furnished by our cook. "They do it in too much of a hurry," she went on, alluding to the great restaurants, "and then it's not all done together. You want the beef to become like a sponge, then it will drink up all the juice to the last drop. Still, there was one of those Cafés where I thought they did know a little bit about cooking. I don't say it was altogether my jelly, but it was very nicely done, and the *soufflés* had plenty of cream." "Do you mean Henry's?" asked my father (who had now joined us), for he greatly enjoyed that restaurant in the Place Gaillon where he went regularly to club dinners. "Oh, dear no!" said Françoise, with a mildness which cloaked her profound contempt. "I meant a little restaurant. At that Henry's it's all very good, sure enough, but it's not a restaurant, it's more like a—soup-kitchen." "Weber's, then?" "Oh, no, sir, I meant a good restaurant. Weber's, that's in the Rue Royale; that's not a restaurant, it's a drinking-shop. I don't know that the food they give you there is even served. I think they don't have any table-cloths; they just shove it down in front of you like that, with a take it or leave it." "Ciro's?" "Oh! there I should say they have the cooking done by ladies of the world." ('World' meant for Françoise the under-world.) "Lord! They need that to fetch the boys in." We could see that, with all her air of simplicity, Françoise was for the celebrities of her profession a more disastrous 'comrade' than the most jealous, the most infatuated of actresses. We felt, all the same, that she had a proper feeling for her art and a respect for tradition; for she went on: "No, I mean a restaurant where they looked as if they kept a very good little family table. It's a place of some consequence, too. Plenty of custom there. Oh, they raked in the coppers there, all right." Françoise, being an economist, reckoned in coppers, where your plunger would reckon in gold. "Madame knows the place well enough, down there to the right along the main boulevards, a little way back." The restaurant of which she spoke with this blend of pride and good-humoured tolerance was, it turned out, the Café Anglais.

When New Year's Day came, I first of all paid a round of family visits with Mamma who, so as not to tire me, had planned them beforehand (with the aid of an itinerary drawn up by my father) according to districts rather than to degrees of kinship. But no sooner had we entered the drawing-room of the distant cousin whose claim to being visited first was that her house was at no distance from ours, than my mother was horrified to see standing there, his present of *marrons glacés* or *déguisés* in his hand, the bosom friend of the most sensitive of all my uncles, to whom he would at once go and report that we had not begun our round with him. And this uncle would certainly be hurt; he would have thought it quite natural that we should go from the Madeleine to the Jardin des Plantes, where he lived, before stopping at Saint-Augustin, on our way to the Rue de l'Ecole de Médecine.

Our visits ended (my grandmother had dispensed us from the duty of calling on her, since we were to dine there that evening), I ran all the way to the Champs-Elysées to give to our own special stall-keeper, with instructions to hand it over to the person who came to her several times a week from the Swanns to buy gingerbread, the letter which, on the day when my friend had caused me so much anxiety, I had decided to send her at the New Year, and in which I told her that our old friendship was vanishing with the old year, that I would forget, now, my old sorrows and disappointments, and that, from this first day of January, it was a new friendship that we were going to cement, one so solid that nothing could destroy it, so wonderful that I hoped that Gilberte would go out of her way to preserve it in all its beauty, and to warn me in time, as I promised to warn her, should either of us detect the least sign of a peril that might endanger it. On our way home Françoise made me stop at the corner of the Rue Royale, before an open-air stall from which she selected for her own stock of presents photographs of Pius IX and Raspail, while for myself I purchased one of Berma. The innumerable admiration which that artist excited gave an air almost of poverty to this one face that she had to respond with, unalterable and precarious as are the garments of people who have not a 'change,' this face on which she must continually expose to view only the tiny dimple upon her upper lip, the arch of her eyebrows, a few other physical peculiarities always the same, which, when it came to that, were at the mercy of a burn or a blow. This face, moreover, could not in itself have seemed to me beautiful, but it gave me the idea, and consequently the desire to kiss it by reason of all the kisses that it must have received, for which, from its page in the album, it seemed still to be appealing with that coquettishly tender gaze, that artificially ingenuous smile. For our Berma must indeed have felt for many young men those longings which she confessed under cover of the personality of Phaedra, longings of which everything, even the glamour of her name which enhanced her beauty and prolonged her youth, must render the gratification so easy to her. Night was falling; I stopped before a column of playbills, on which was posted that of the piece in which she was to appear on January 1. A moist and gentle breeze was blowing. It was a time of day and year that I knew; I suddenly felt a presentiment that New Year's Day was not a day different from the rest, that it was not the first day of a new world, in which, I might, by a chance that had never yet occurred, that was still intact, make Gilberte's acquaintance afresh, as at the Creation of the World, as though the past had no longer any existence, as though there had been obliterated, with the indications which I might have preserved for my future guidance, the disappointments which she had sometimes brought me; a new world in which nothing should subsist from the old—save one thing, my desire that Gilberte should love me. I realised that if my heart hoped for such a reconstruction, round about it, of a universe that had not satisfied it before, it was because my heart had not altered, and I told myself that there was no reason why Gilberte's should have altered either; I felt that this new friendship was the same, just as there is no boundary ditch between their forerunners and those new years which our desire for them, without being able to reach and so to modify them, invests, unknown to themselves, with distinctive names. I might dedicate this new year, if I chose, to Gilberte, and as one bases a religious system upon the blind laws of nature, endeavour to stamp New Year's Day with the particular image that I had formed of it; but in vain, I felt that it was not aware that people called it New Year's Day, that it was passing in a wintry dusk in a manner that was not novel to me; in the gentle breeze that floated about the column of playbills I had recognised, I had felt reappear the eternal, the universal substance, the familiar moisture, the unheeding fluidity of the old days and years.

I returned to the house. I had spent the New Year's Day of old men, who differ on that day from their juniors, not because people have ceased to give them presents but because they themselves have ceased to believe in the New Year. Presents I had indeed received, but not that present which alone could bring me pleasure, namely a line from Gilberte. I was young still, none the less, since I had been able to write her one, by means of which I hoped, in telling her of my solitary dreams of love and longing, to arouse similar dreams in her. The sadness of men who have grown old lies in their no longer even thinking of writing such letters, the futility of which their experience has shewn.

After I was in bed, the noises of the street, unduly prolonged upon this festive evening, kept me awake. I thought of all the people who were ending the night in pleasure, of the lover, the troop, it might be, of debauchees who would be going to meet Berma at the stage-door after the play that I had seen announced for this evening. I was not even able, so as to calm the agitation which that idea engendered in me during my sleepless night, to assure myself that Berma was not, perhaps, thinking about love, since the lines that she was reciting, which she had long and carefully rehearsed, reminded her at every moment that love is an exquisite thing, as of course she already knew, and knew so well that she displayed its familiar pangs—only enriched with a new violence and an unsuspected sweetness—to her astonished audience; and yet each of them had felt those pangs himself. I lighted my candle again, to look once more upon her face. At the thought that it was, no doubt, at that very moment being caressed by those men whom I could not prevent from giving to Berma and receiving from her joys superhuman but vague, I felt an emotion more cruel than voluptuous, a longing that was aggravated presently by the sound of a horn, as one hears it on the nights of the Lenten carnival and often of other public holidays, which, because it then lacks all poetry, is more saddening, coming from a toy squeaker, than "at evening, in the depth of the woods." At that moment, a message from Gilberte would perhaps not have been what I wanted. Our desires cut across one another's paths, and in this confused existence it is but rarely that a piece of good fortune coincides with the desire that clamoured for it.

I continued to go to the Champs-Elysées on fine days, along streets whose stylish pink houses seemed to be washed (because exhibitions of water-colours were then at the height of fashion) in a lightly floating atmosphere. It would be untrue to say that in those days the palaces of Gabriel struck me as being of greater beauty, or even of another epoch than the adjoining houses. I found more style, and should have supposed more antiquity if not in the Palais de l'Industrie at any rate in the Trocadéro. Plunged in a restless sleep, my adolescence embodied in one uniform vision the whole of the quarter through which it might be strolling, and I had never dreamed that there could be an eighteenth century building in the Rue Royale, just as I should have been astonished to learn that the Porte-Saint-Martin and the Porte-Saint-Denis, those glories of the age of Louis XIV, were not contemporary with the most recently built tenements in the sordid regions that bore their names. Once only one of Gabriel's palaces made me stop for more than a moment; that was because, night having fallen, its columns, dematerialised by the moonlight, had the appearance of having been cut out in pasteboard, and by recalling to me a scene in the operetta *Orphée aux Enfers* gave me for the first time an impression of beauty.

Meanwhile Gilberte never came to the Champs-Elysées. And yet it was imperative that I should see her, for I could not so much as remember what she was like. The questing, anxious, exacting way that we have of looking at the person we love, our eagerness for the word which shall give us or take from us the hope of an appointment for the morrow, and, until that word is uttered, our alternative if not simultaneous imaginings of joy and of despair, all these make our observation, in the beloved object's presence, too tremulous to be able to carry away a clear impression of her. Perhaps, also, that activity of all the senses at once which endeavours to learn from the visible aspect alone what lies behind it is over-indulgent to the thousand forms, to the changing fragrance, to the movements of the living person whom as a rule, when we are not in love, we regard as fixed in one permanent position. Whereas the beloved model does not stay still; and our mental photographs of her are always blurred. I did not rightly know how Gilberte's features were composed, save in the heavenly moments when she disclosed them to me; I could remember nothing but her smile. And not being able to see again that beloved face, despite every effort that I might make to recapture it, I would be disgusted to find, outlined in my memory with a maddening precision of detail, the meaningless, emphatic faces of the man with the wooden horses and of the barley-sugar woman; just as those who have lost a dear friend whom they never see even while they are asleep, are exasperated at meeting incessantly in their dreams any number of insupportable creatures whom it is quite enough to have known in the waking world. In their inability to form any image of the object of their grief they are almost led to assert that they feel no grief. And I was not far from believing that, since I could not recall the features of Gilberte, I had forgotten Gilberte herself, and no longer loved her. At length she returned to play there almost every day, setting before me fresh pleasures to desire, to demand of her for the morrow, indeed making my love for her every day, in this sense, a new love. But an incident was to change once again, and abruptly, the manner in which, at about two o'clock every afternoon, the problem of my love confronted me. Had M. Swann intercepted the letter that I had written to his daughter, or was Gilberte merely confessing to me long after the event, and so that I should be more prudent in future, a state of things already long established? As I was telling her how greatly I admired her father and mother, she assumed that vague air, full of reticence and kept secrets, which she invariably wore when anyone spoke to her of what she was going to do, her walks, drives, visits—then suddenly expressed it with: "You know, they can't abide you!" and, slipping from me like the Undine that she was, burst out laughing. Often her laughter, out of harmony with her words, seemed, as music seems, to be tracing an invisible surface on another plane. M. and Mme. Swann did not require Gilberte to give up playing with me, but they would have been just as well pleased, she thought, if we had never begun. They did not look upon our relations with a kindly eye; they believed me to be a young person of low moral standard and imagined that my influence over their daughter must be evil. This type of unscrupulous young man whom the Swanns thought that I resembled, I pictured him to myself as detesting the parents of the girl he loved, flattering them to their faces but, when he was alone with her, making fun of them, urging her on to disobey them and, when once he had completed his conquest, not allowing them even to set eyes on her again. With these characteristics (though they are never those under which the basest of scoundrels recognises himself) how vehemently did my heart contrast the sentiments that did indeed animate it with regard to Swann, so passionate, on the contrary, that I never doubted that, were he to have the least suspicion of them, he must repent of his condemnation of me as of a judicial error. All that I felt about him I made bold to express to him in a long letter which I entrusted to Gilberte, with the request that she would deliver it. She consented. Alas! so he saw in me an even greater impostor than I had feared; those sentiments which I had supposed myself to be portraying, in sixteen pages, with such amplitude of truth, so he had suspected them; in short, the letter that I had written him, as ardent and as sincere as the words that I had uttered to M. de Norpois, met with no more success. Gilberte told me next day, after taking me aside behind a clump of laurels, along a little path by which we sat down on a couple of chairs, that as he read my letter, which she had now brought back to me, her father had shrugged his shoulders, with: "All this means nothing; it only goes to prove how right I was." I, who knew the purity of my intentions, the goodness of my soul, was furious that my words should not even have impinged upon the surface of Swann's ridiculous error. For it was an error; of that I had then no doubt. I felt that I had described with such accuracy certain irrefutable characteristics of my generous sentiments that, if Swann had not at once reconstructed these from my indications, had not come to ask my forgiveness and to admit that he had been mistaken, it must be because these noble sentiments he had never himself experienced, which would make him incapable of understanding the existence of them in other people.

Well, perhaps it was simply that Swann knew that generosity is often no more than the inner aspect which our egotistical feelings assume when we have not yet named and classified them. Perhaps he had recognised in the sympathy that I expressed for him simply an effect—and the strongest possible proof—of my love for Gilberte, by which, and not by any subordinate veneration of himself, my subsequent actions would be irresistibly controlled. I was unable to share his point of view, since I had not succeeded in abstracting my love from myself, in forcing it back into the common experience of humanity, and thus suffering, experimentally, its consequences; I was in despair. I was obliged to leave Gilberte for a moment; Françoise had called me. I must accompany her into a little pavilion covered in a green trellis, not unlike one of the disused toll-houses of old Paris, in which had recently been installed what in England they call a lavatory but in France, by an ill-informed piece of anglomania, 'water-closets.' The old, damp walls at the entrance, where I stood waiting for Françoise, emitted a chill and fusty smell which, relieving me at once of the anxieties that Swann's words, as reported by Gilberte, had just awakened in me, pervaded me with a pleasure not at all of the same character as other pleasures, which leave one more unstable than before, incapable of retaining them, of possessing them, but, on the contrary, with a consistent pleasure on which I could lean for support, delicious, soothing, rich with a truth that was lasting, unexplained and certain. I should have liked, as long ago in my walks along the Guermantes way, to endeavour to penetrate the charm of this impression which had seized hold of me, and, remaining there motionless, to interrogate this antiquated emanation which invited me not to enjoy the pleasure which it was offering me only as an 'extra,' but to descend into the underlying reality which it had not yet disclosed to me. But the tenant of the establishment, an elderly dame with painted cheeks and an auburn wig, was speaking to me. Françoise thought her 'very well-to-do indeed.' Her 'missy' had married what Françoise called 'a young man of family,' which meant that he differed more, in her eyes, from a workman than, in Saint-Simon's, a duke did from a man 'risen from the dregs of the people.' No doubt the tenant, before entering upon her tenancy, had met with reverses. But Françoise was positive that she was a 'marquise,' and belonged to the Saint-Ferréol family. This 'marquise' warned me not to stand outside in the cold, and even opened one of her doors for me, saying: "Won't you go inside for a minute? Look, here's a nice, clean one, and I shan't charge *you* anything." Perhaps she just made this offer in the spirit in which the young ladies at Gouache's, when we went in there to order something, used to offer me one of the sweets which they kept on the counter under glass bells, and which, alas, Mamma would never allow me to take; perhaps with less innocence, like an old florist whom Mamma used to have in to replenish her flower-stands, who rolled languishing eyes at me as she handed me a rose. In any event, if the 'marquise' had a weakness for little boys, when she threw open to them the hypogean doors of those cubicles of stone in which men crouch like sphinxes, she must have been moved to that generosity less by the hope of corrupting them than by the pleasure which all of us feel in displaying a needless prodigality to those whom we love, for I have never seen her with any other visitor except an old park-keeper.

A moment later I said good-bye to the 'marquise,' and went out accompanied by Françoise, whom I left to return to Gilberte. I caught sight of her at once, on a chair, behind the clump of laurels. She was there so as not to be seen by her friends: they were playing at hide-and-seek. I went and sat down by her side. She had on a flat cap which drooped forwards over her eyes, giving her the same 'underhand,' brooding, crafty look which I had remarked in her that first time at Combray. I asked her if there was not some way for me to have it out with her father, face to face. Gilberte said that she had suggested that to him, but that he had not thought it of any use. "Look," she went on, "don't go away without your letter; I must run along to the others, as they haven't caught me."

Had Swann appeared on the scene then before I had recovered it, this letter, by the sincerity of which I felt that he had been so unreasonable in not letting himself be convinced, perhaps he would have seen that it was he who had been in the right. For as I approached Gilberte, who, leaning back in her chair, told me to take the letter but did not hold it out to me, I felt myself so irresistibly attracted by her body that I said to her:

"Look! You try to stop me from getting it; we'll see which is the stronger."

She thrust it behind her back; I put my arms round her neck, raising the plaits of hair which she wore over her shoulders, either because she was still of an age for that or because her mother chose to make her look a child for a little longer so that she herself might still seem young; and we wrestled, locked together. I tried to pull her towards me, she resisted; her cheeks, inflamed by the effort, were as red and round as two cherries; she laughed as though I were tickling her; I held her gripped between my legs like a young tree which I was trying to climb; and, in the middle of my gymnastics, when I was already out of breath with the muscular exercise and the heat of the game, I felt, as it were a few drops of sweat wrung from me by the effort, my pleasure express itself in a form which I could not even pause for a moment to analyse; immediately I snatched the letter from her. Whereupon Gilberte said, good-naturedly:

"You know, if you like, we might go on wrestling for a little."

Perhaps she was dimly conscious that my game had had another object than that which I had avowed, but too dimly to have been able to see that I had attained it. And I, who was afraid that she had seen (and a slight recoil, as though of offended modesty which she made and checked a moment later made me think that my fear had not been unfounded), agreed to go on wrestling, lest she should suppose that I had indeed no other object than that, after which I wished only to sit quietly by her side.

On my way home I perceived, I suddenly recollected the impression, concealed from me until then, towards which, without letting me distinguish or recognise it, the cold, almost sooty smell of the trellised pavilion had borne me. It was that of my uncle Adolphe's little sitting-room at Combray, which had indeed exhaled the same odour of humidity. But I could not understand, and I postponed the attempt to discover why the recollection of so trivial an impression had given me so keen a happiness. It struck me, however, that I did indeed deserve the contempt of M. de Norpois; I had preferred, hitherto, to all other writers, one whom he styled a mere 'flute-player' and a positive rapture had been conveyed to me, not by any important idea, but by a mouldy smell.

For some time past, in certain households, the name of the Champs-Elysées, if a visitor mentioned it, would be greeted by the mother of the family with that air of contempt which mothers keep for a physician of established reputation whom they have (or so they make out) seen make too many false diagnoses to have any faith left in him; people insisted that these gardens were not good for children, that they knew of more than one sore throat, more than one case of measles and any number of feverish chills for which the Champs must be held responsible. Without venturing openly to doubt the maternal affection of Mamma, who continued to let me play there, several of her friends deplored her inability to see what was as plain as daylight.

Neurotic subjects are perhaps less addicted than any, despite the time-honoured phrase, to 'listening to their insides': they can hear so many things going on inside themselves, by which they realise later that they did wrong to let themselves be alarmed, that they end by paying no attention to any of them. Their nervous systems have so often cried out to them for help, as though from some serious malady, when it was merely because snow was coming, or because they had to change their rooms, that they have acquired the habit of paying no more heed to these warnings than a soldier who in the heat of battle perceives them so little that he is capable, although dying, of carrying on for some days still the life of a man in perfect health. One morning, bearing arranged within me all my regular disabilities, from whose constant, internal circulation I kept my mind turned as resolutely away as from the circulation of my blood, I had come running into the dining-room where my parents were already at table, and —having assured myself, as usual, that to feel cold may mean not that one ought to warm oneself but that, for instance, one has received a scolding, and not to feel hungry that it is going to rain, and not that one ought not to eat anything—had taken my place between them when, in the act of swallowing the first mouthful of a particularly tempting cutlet, a nausea, a giddiness stopped me, the feverish reaction of a malady that had already begun, the symptoms of which had been masked, retarded by the ice of my indifference, but which obstinately refused the nourishment that I was not in a fit state to absorb. Then, at the same moment, the thought that they would stop me from going out if they saw that I was unwell gave me, as the instinct of self-preservation gives a wounded man, the strength to crawl to my own room, where I found that I had a temperature of 104, and then to get ready to go to the Champs-Elysées. Through the languid and vulnerable shell which encased them, my eager thoughts were urging me towards, were clamouring for the soothing delight of a game of prisoner's base with Gilberte, and an hour later, barely able to keep on my feet, but happy in being by her side, I had still the strength to enjoy it.

Françoise, on our return, declared that I had been 'taken bad,' that I must have caught a 'hot and cold,' while the doctor, who was called in at once, declared that he 'preferred' the 'severity,' the 'virulence' of the rush of fever which accompanied my congestion of the lungs, and would be no more than 'a fire of straw,' to other forms, more 'insidious' and 'septic.' For some time now I had been liable to choking fits, and our doctor, braving the disapproval of my grandmother, who could see me already dying a drunkard's death, had recommended me to take, as well as the caffeine which had been prescribed to help me to breathe, beer, champagne or brandy when I felt an attack coming. These attacks would subside, he told me, in the 'euphoria' brought about by the alcohol. I was often obliged, so that my grandmother should allow them to give it to me, instead of dissembling, almost to make a display of my state of suffocation. On the other hand, as soon as I felt an attack coming, never being quite certain what proportions it would assume, I would grow distressed at the thought of my grandmother's anxiety, of which I was far more afraid than of my own sufferings. But at the same time my body, either because it was too weak to keep those sufferings secret, or because it feared lest, in their ignorance of the imminent disaster, people might demand of me some exertion which it would have found impossible or dangerous, gave me the need to warn my grandmother of my attacks with a punctiliousness into which I finally put a sort of physiological scruple. Did I perceive in myself a disturbing symptom which I had not previously observed, my body was in distress so long as I had not communicated it to my grandmother. Did she pretend to pay no attention, it made me insist. Sometimes I went too far; and that dear face, which was no longer able always to control its emotion as in the past, would allow an expression of pity to appear, a painful contraction. Then my heart was wrung by the sight of her grief; as if my kisses had had power to expel that grief, as if my affection could give my grandmother as much joy as my recovery, I flung myself into her arms. And its scruples being at the same time calmed by the certainty that she now knew the discomfort that I felt, my body offered no opposition to my reassuring her. I protested that this discomfort had been nothing, that I was in no sense to be pitied, that she might be quite sure that I was now happy; my body had wished to secure exactly the amount of pity that it deserved, and, provided that someone knew that it 'had a pain' in its right side, it could see no harm in my declaring that this pain was of no consequence and was not an obstacle to my happiness; for my body did not pride itself on its philosophy; that was outside its province. Almost every day during my convalescence I passed through these crises of suffocation. One evening, after my grandmother had left me comparatively well, she returned to my room very late and, seeing me struggling for breath, "Oh, my poor boy," she exclaimed, her face quivering with sympathy, "you are in dreadful pain." She left me at once; I heard the outer gate open, and in a little while she came back with some brandy which she had gone out to buy, since there was none in the house. Presently I began to feel better. My grandmother, who was rather flushed, seemed 'put out' about something, and her eyes had a look of weariness and dejection.

"I shall leave you alone now, and let you get the good of this improvement," she said, rising suddenly to go. I detained her, however, for a kiss, and could feel on her cold cheek something moist, but did not know whether it was the dampness of the night air through which she had just passed. Next day, she did not come to my room until the evening, having had, she told me, to go out. I considered that this shewed a surprising indifference to my welfare, and I had to restrain myself so as not to reproach her with it.

As my chokings had persisted long after any congestion remained that could account for them, my parents asked for a consultation with Professor Cottard. It is not enough that a physician who is called in to treat cases of this sort should be learned. Brought face to face with symptoms which may or may not be those of three or four different complaints, it is in the long run his instinct, his eye that must decide with which, despite the more or less similar appearance of them all, he has to deal. This mysterious gift does not imply any superiority in the other departments of the intellect, and a creature of the utmost vulgarity, who admires the worst pictures, the worst music, in whose mind there is nothing out of the common, may perfectly well possess it. In my case, what was physically evident might equally well have been due to nervous spasms, to the first stages of tuberculosis, to asthma, to a toxi-alimentary dyspnoea with renal insufficiency, to chronic bronchitis, or to a complex state into which more than one of these factors entered. Now, nervous spasms required to be treated firmly, and discouraged, tuberculosis with infinite care and with a 'feeding-up' process which would have been bad for an arthritic condition such as asthma, and might indeed have been dangerous in a case of toxi-alimentary dyspnoea, this last calling for a strict diet which, in return, would be fatal to a tuberculous patient. But Cottard's hesitations were brief and his prescriptions imperious. "Purges; violent and drastic purges; milk for some days, nothing but milk. No meat. No alcohol." My mother murmured that I needed, all the same, to be 'built up,' that my nerves were already weak, that drenching me like a horse and restricting my diet would make me worse. I could see in Cottard's eyes, as uneasy as though he were afraid of missing a train, that he was asking himself whether he had not allowed his natural good-humour to appear. He was trying to think whether he had remembered to put on his mask of coldness, as one looks for a mirror to see whether one has not forgotten to tie one's tie. In his uncertainty, and, so as, whatever he had done, to put things right, he replied brutally: "I am not in the habit of repeating my instructions. Give me a pen. Now remember, milk! Later on, when we have got the crises and the agrypnia by the throat, I should like you to take a little clear soup, and then a little broth, but always with milk; *au lait*! You'll enjoy that, since Spain is all the rage just now; *ollé, ollé*!" His pupils knew this joke well, for he made it at the hospital whenever he had to put a heart or liver case on a milk diet. "After that, you will gradually return to your normal life. But whenever there is any coughing or choking—purges, injections, bed, milk!" He listened with icy calm, and without uttering a word, to my mother's final objections, and as he left us without having condescended to explain the reasons for this course of treatment, my parents concluded that it had no bearing on my case, and would weaken me to no purpose, and so they did not make me try it. Naturally they sought to conceal their disobedience from the Professor, and to succeed in this avoided all the houses in which he was likely to be found. Then, as my health became worse, they decided to make me follow out Cottard's prescriptions to the letter; in three days my 'rattle' and cough had ceased, I could breathe freely. Whereupon we realised that Cottard, while finding, as he told us later on, that I was distinctly asthmatic, and still more inclined to 'imagine things,' had seen that what was really the matter with me at the moment was intoxication, and that by loosening my liver and washing out my kidneys he would get rid of the congestion of my bronchial tubes and thus give me back my breath, my sleep and my strength. And we realised that this imbecile was a clinical genius. At last I was able to get up. But they spoke of not letting me go any more to the Champs-Elysées. They said that it was because the air there was bad; but I felt sure that this was only a pretext so that I should not see Mlle. Swann, and I forced myself to repeat the name of Gilberte all the time, like the native tongue which peoples in captivity endeavour to preserve among themselves so as not to forget the land that they will never see again. Sometimes my mother would stroke my forehead with her hand, saying: "So little boys don't tell Mamma their troubles any more?" And Françoise used to come up to me every day with: "What a face, to be sure! If you could just see yourself! Anyone would think there was a corpse in the house." It is true that, if I had simply had a cold in the head, Françoise would have assumed the same funereal air. These lamentations pertained rather to her 'class' than to the state of my health. I could not at the time discover whether this pessimism was due to sorrow or to satisfaction. I decided provisionally that it was social and professional.

One day, after the postman had called, my mother laid a letter upon my bed. I opened it carelessly, since it could not bear the one signature that would have made me happy, the name of Gilberte, with whom I had no relations outside the Champs-Elysées. And lo, at the foot of the page, embossed with a silver seal representing a man's head in a helmet, and under him a scroll with the device *Per viam rectam,* beneath a letter written in a large and flowing hand, in which almost every word appeared to be underlined, simply because the crosses of the 't's' ran not across but over them, and so drew a line beneath the corresponding letters of the word above, it was indeed Gilberte's signature and nothing else that I saw. But because I knew that to be impossible upon a letter addressed to myself, the sight of it, unaccompanied by any belief in it, gave me no pleasure. For a moment it merely struck an impression of unreality on everything round about me. With lightning rapidity the impossible signature danced about my bed, the fireplace, the four walls. I saw everything sway, as one does when one falls from a horse, and I asked myself whether there was not an existence altogether different from the one I knew, in direct contradiction of it, but itself the true existence, which, being suddenly revealed to me, filled me with that hesitation which sculptors, in representing the Last Judgment, have given to the awakening dead who find themselves at the gates of the next world. "My dear Friend," said the letter, "I hear that you have been very ill and have given up going to the Champs-Elysées. I hardly ever go there either because there has been such an enormous lot of illness. But I'm having my friends to tea here every Monday and Friday. Mamma asks me to tell you that it will be a great pleasure to us all if you will come too, as soon as you are well again, and we can have some more nice talks here, just like the Champs-Elysées. Good-bye, dear friend; I hope that your parents will allow you to come to tea very often. With all my kindest regards. GILBERTE."

While I was reading these words, my nervous system was receiving, with admirable promptitude, the news that a piece of great good fortune had befallen me. But my mind, that is to say myself, and in fact the party principally concerned, was still in ignorance. Such good fortune, coming from Gilberte, was a thing of which I had never ceased to dream; a thing wholly in my mind, it was, as Leonardo says of painting, *cosa mentale.* Now, a sheet of paper covered with writing is not a thing that the mind assimilates at once. But as soon as I had finished reading the letter, I thought of it, it became an object of my dreams, became, it also, *cosa* *mentale,* and I loved it so much already that every few minutes I must read it, kiss it again. Then at last I was conscious of my happiness.

Life is strewn with these miracles, for which people who are in love can always hope. It is possible that this one had been artificially brought about by my mother who, seeing that for some time past I had lost all interest in life, may have suggested to Gilberte to write to me, just as, when I was little and went first to the sea-side, so as to give me some pleasure in bathing, which I detested because it took away my breath, she used secretly to hand to the man who was to 'dip' me marvellous boxes made of shells, and branches of coral, which I believed that I myself had discovered lying at the bottom of the sea. However, with every occurrence which, in our life and among its contrasted situations, bears any relation to love, it is best to make no attempt to understand it, since in so far as these are inexorable, as they are unlooked-for, they appear to be governed by magic rather than by rational laws. When a multi-millionaire—who for all his millions is quite a charming person—sent packing by a poor and unattractive woman with whom he has been living, calls to his aid, in his desperation, all the resources of wealth, and brings every worldly influence to bear without succeeding in making her take him back, it is wiser for him, in the face of the implacable obstinacy of his mistress, to suppose that Fate intends to crush him, and to make him die of an affection of the heart, than to seek any logical explanation. These obstacles, against which lovers have to contend, and which their imagination, over-excited by suffering, seeks in vain to analyse, are contained, as often as not, in some peculiar characteristic of the woman whom they cannot bring back to themselves, in her stupidity, in the influence acquired over her, the fears suggested to her by people whom the lover does not know, in the kind of pleasures which, at the moment, she is demanding of life, pleasures which neither her lover nor her lover's wealth can procure for her. In any event, the lover is scarcely in a position to discover the nature of these obstacles, which her womanly cunning hides from him and his own judgment, falsified by love, prevents him from estimating exactly. They may be compared with those tumours which the doctor succeeds in reducing, but without having traced them to their source. Like them these obstacles remain mysterious but are temporary. Only they last, as a rule, longer than love itself. And as that is not a disinterested passion, the lover who is no longer in love does not seek to know why the woman, neither rich nor virtuous, with whom he was in love refused obstinately for years to let him continue to keep her.

Now the same mystery which often veils from our eyes the reason for a catastrophe, when love is in question, envelops just as frequently the suddenness of certain happy solutions, such as had come to me with Gilberte's letter. Happy, or at least seemingly happy, for there are few solutions that can really be happy when we are dealing with a sentiment of such a kind that every satisfaction which we can bring to it does no more, as a rule, than dislodge some pain. And yet sometimes a respite is granted us, and we have for a little while the illusion that we are healed.

So far as concerns this letter, at the foot of which Françoise declined to recognise Gilberte's name, because the elaborate capital 'G' leaning against the undotted 'i' looked more like an 'A,' while the final syllable was indefinitely prolonged by a waving flourish, if we persist in looking for a rational explanation of the sudden reversal of her attitude towards me which it indicated, and which made me so radiantly happy, we may perhaps find that I was to some extent indebted for it to an incident which I should have supposed, on the contrary, to be calculated to ruin me for ever in the sight of the Swann family. A short while back, Bloch had come to see me at a time when Professor Cottard, whom, now that I was following his instructions, we were again calling in, happened to be in my room. As his examination of me was over, and he was sitting with me simply as a visitor because my parents had invited him to stay to dinner, Bloch was allowed to come in. While we were all talking, Bloch having mentioned that he had heard it said that Mme. Swann was very fond of me, by a lady with whom he had been dining the day before, who was herself very intimate with Mme. Swann, I should have liked to reply that he was most certainly mistaken, and to establish the fact (from the same scruple of conscience that had made me proclaim it to M. de Norpois, and for fear of Mme. Swann's taking me for a liar) that I did not know her and had never spoken to her. But I had not the courage to correct Bloch's mistake, because I could see quite well that it was deliberate, and that, if he invented something that Mme. Swann could not possibly have said, it was simply to let us know (what he considered flattering to himself, and was not true either) that he had been dining with one of that lady's friends. And so it fell out that, whereas M. de Norpois, on learning that I did not know but would very much like to know Mme. Swann, had taken great care to avoid speaking to her about me, Cottard, who was her doctor also, having gathered from what he had heard Bloch say that she knew me quite well and thought highly of me, concluded that to remark, when next he saw her, that I was a charming young fellow and a great friend of his could not be of the smallest use to me and would be of advantage to himself, two reasons which made him decide to speak of me to Odette whenever an opportunity arose.

Thus at length I found my way into that abode from which was wafted even on to the staircase the scent that Mme. Swann used, though it was embalmed far more sweetly still by the peculiar, disturbing charm that emanated from the life of Gilberte. The implacable porter, transformed into a benevolent Eumenid, adopted the custom, when I asked him if I might go upstairs, of indicating to me, by raising his cap with a propitious hand, that he gave ear to my prayer. Those windows which, seen from outside, used to interpose between me and the treasures within, which were not intended for me, a polished, distant and superficial stare, which seemed to me the very stare of the Swanns themselves, it fell to my lot, when in the warm weather I had spent a whole afternoon with Gilberte in her room, to open them myself, so as to let in a little air, and even to lean over the sill of one of them by her side, if it was her mother's 'at home' day, to watch the visitors arrive who would often, raising their heads as they stepped out of their carriages, greet me with a wave of the hand, taking me for some nephew of their hostess. At such moments Gilberte's plaits used to brush my cheek. They seemed to me, in the fineness of their grain, at once natural and supernatural, and in the strength of their constructed tracery, a matchless work of art, in the composition of which had been used the very grass of Paradise. To a section of them, even infinitely minute, what celestial herbary would I not have given as a reliquary. But since I never hoped to obtain an actual fragment of those plaits, if at least I had been able to have their photograph, how far more precious than one of a sheet of flowers traced by Vinci's pencil! To acquire one of these, I stooped—with friends of the Swanns, and even with photographers—to servilities which did not procure for me what I wanted, but tied me for life to a number of extremely tiresome people.

Gilberte's parents, who for so long had prevented me from seeing her, now—when I entered the dark hall in which hovered perpetually, more formidable and more to be desired than, at Versailles of old, the apparition of the King, the possibility of my encountering them, in which too, invariably, after butting into an enormous hat-stand with seven branches, like the Candlestick in Holy Writ, I would begin bowing confusedly before a footman, seated among the skirts of his long grey coat upon the woodbox, whom in the dim light I had mistaken for Mme. Swann—Gilberte's parents, if one of them happened to be passing at the moment of my arrival, so far from seeming annoyed would come and shake hands with a smile, and say:

"How d'e do?" (They both pronounced it in the same clipped way, which, you may well imagine, once I was back at home, I made an incessant and delightful practice of copying.) "Does Gilberte know you're here? She does? Then I'll leave you to her."

Better still, the tea-parties themselves to which Gilberte invited her friends, parties which for so long had seemed to me the most insurmountable of the barriers heaped up between her and myself, became now an opportunity for uniting us of which she would inform me in a few lines, written (because I was still a comparative stranger) upon sheets that were always different. One was adorned with a poodle embossed in blue, above a fantastic inscription in English with an exclamation mark after it; another was stamped with an anchor, or with the monogram G. S. preposterously elongated in a rectangle which ran from top to bottom of the page, or else with the name Gilberte, now traced across one corner in letters of gold which imitated my friend's signature and ended in a flourish, beneath an open umbrella printed in black, now enclosed in a monogram in the shape of a Chinaman's hat, which contained all the letters of the word in capitals without its being possible to make out a single one of them. At last, as the series of different writing-papers which Gilberte possessed, numerous as it might be, was not unlimited, after a certain number of weeks I saw reappear the sheet that bore (like the first letter she had written me) the motto *Per viam rectam*, and over it the man's head in a helmet, set in a medallion of tarnished silver. And each of them was chosen, on one day rather than another, by virtue of a certain ritual, as I then supposed, but more probably, as I now think, because she tried to remember which of them she had already used, so as never to send the same one twice to any of her correspondents, of those at least whom she took special pains to please, save at the longest possible intervals. As, on account of the different times of their lessons, some of the friends whom Gilberte used to invite to her parties were obliged to leave just as the rest were arriving, while I was still on the stairs I could hear escaping from the hall a murmur of voices which, such was the emotion aroused in me by the imposing ceremony in which I was to take part, long before I had reached the landing, broke all the bonds that still held me to my past life, so that I did not even remember that I was to take off my muffler as soon as I felt too hot, and to keep an eye on the clock so as not to be late in getting home. That staircase, besides, all of wood, as they were built about that time in certain houses, in keeping with that Henri II style which had for so long been Odette's ideal though she was shortly to lose interest in it, and furnished with a placard, to which there was no equivalent at home, on which one read the words: "NOTICE. The lift must not be taken downstairs," seemed to me a thing so marvellous that I told my parents that it was an ancient staircase brought from ever so far away by M. Swann. My regard for the truth was so great that I should not have hesitated to give them this information even if I had known it to be false, for it alone could enable them to feel for the dignity of the Swanns' staircase the same respect that I felt myself. It was just as, when one is talking to some ignorant person who cannot understand in what the genius of a great physician consists, it is as well not to admit that he does not know how to cure a cold in the head. But since I had no power of observation, since, as a general rule, I never knew either the name or the nature of things that were before my eyes, and could understand only that when they were connected with the Swanns they must be extraordinary, I was by no means certain that in notifying my parents of the artistic value and remote origin of the staircase I was guilty of falsehood. It did not seem certain; but it must have seemed probable, for I felt myself turn very red when my father interrupted me with: "I know those houses; I have been in one; they are all alike; Swann just has several floors in one; it was Berlier built them all." He added that he had thought of taking a flat in one of them, but that he had changed his mind, finding that they were not conveniently arranged, and that the landings were too dark. So he said; but I felt instinctively that my mind must make the sacrifices necessary to the glory of the Swanns and to my own happiness, and by a stroke of internal authority, in spite of what I had just heard, I banished for ever from my memory, as a good Catholic banishes Renan's *Vie de Jésus,* the destroying thought that their house was just an ordinary flat in which we ourselves might have been living.

Meanwhile on those tea-party days, pulling myself up the staircase step by step, reason and memory already cast off like outer garments, and myself no more now than the sport of the basest reflexes, I would arrive in the zone in which the scent of Mme. Swann greeted my nostrils. I felt that I could already behold the majesty of the chocolate cake, encircled by plates heaped with little cakes, and by tiny napkins of grey damask with figures on them, as required by convention but peculiar to the Swanns. But this unalterable and governed whole seemed, like Kant's necessary universe, to depend on a supreme act of free will. For when we were all together in Gilberte's little sitting-room, suddenly she would look at the clock and exclaim:

"I say! It's getting a long time since luncheon, and we aren't having dinner till eight. I feel as if I could eat something. What do you say?"

And she would make us go into the dining-room, as sombre as the interior of an Asiatic Temple painted by Rembrandt, in which an architectural cake, as gracious and sociable as it was imposing, seemed to be enthroned there in any event, in case the fancy seized Gilberte to discrown it of its chocolate battlements and to hew down the steep brown slopes of its ramparts, baked in the oven like the bastions of the palace of Darius. Better still, in proceeding to the demolition of that Babylonitish pastry, Gilberte did not consider only her own hunger; she inquired also after mine, while she extracted for me from the crumbling monument a whole glazed slab jewelled with scarlet fruits, in the oriental style. She asked me even at what o'clock my parents were dining, as if I still knew, as if the disturbance that governed me had allowed to persist the sensation of satiety or of hunger, the notion of dinner or the picture of my family in my empty memory and paralysed stomach. Alas, its paralysis was but momentary. The cakes that I took without noticing them, a time would come when I should have to digest them. But that time was still remote. Meanwhile Gilberte was making 'my' tea. I went on drinking it indefinitely, whereas a single cup would keep me awake for twenty-four hours. Which explains why my mother used always to say: "What a nuisance it is; he can never go to the Swanns' without coming home ill." But was I aware even, when I was at the Swanns', that it was tea that I was drinking? Had I known, I should have taken it just the same, for even supposing that I had recovered for a moment the sense of the present, that would not have restored to me the memory of the past or the apprehension of the future. My imagination was incapable of reaching to the distant time in which I might have the idea of going to bed, and the need to sleep.

Gilberte's girl friends were not all plunged in that state of intoxication in which it is impossible to make up one's mind. Some of them refused tea! Then Gilberte would say, using a phrase highly fashionable that year: "I can see I'm not having much of a success with my tea!" And to destroy more completely any idea of ceremony, she would disarrange the chairs that were drawn up round the table, with: "We look just like a wedding breakfast. Good lord, what fools servants are!"

She nibbled her cake, perched sideways upon a cross-legged seat placed at an angle to the table. And then, just as though she could have had all those cakes at her disposal without having first asked leave of her mother, when Mme. Swann, whose 'day' coincided as a rule with Gilberte's tea-parties, had shewn one of her visitors to the door, and came sweeping in, a moment later, dressed sometimes in blue velvet, more often in a black satin gown draped with white lace, she would say with an air of astonishment: "I say, that looks good, what you've got there. It makes me quite hungry to see you all eating cake."

"But, Mamma, do! We invite you!" Gilberte would answer.

"Thank you, no, my precious; what would my visitors say? I've still got Mme. Trombert and Mme. Cottard and Mme. Bontemps; you know dear Mme. Bontemps never pays very short visits, and she has only just come. What would all those good people say if I never went back to them? If no one else calls, I'll come in again and have a chat with you (which will be far more amusing) after they've all gone. I really think I've earned a little rest; I have had forty-five different people to-day, and forty-two of them told me about Gérôme's picture! But you must come alone one of these days," she turned to me, "and take 'your' tea with Gilberte. She will make it for you just as you like it, as you have it in your own little 'studio,' " she went on, flying off to her visitors, as if it had been something as familiar to me as my own habits (such as the habit that I should have had of taking tea, had I ever taken it; as for my 'studio,' I was uncertain whether I had one or not) that I had come to seek in this mysterious world. "When can you come? To-morrow? We will make you 'toast' every bit as good as you get at Colombin's. No? You are horrid!"—for, since she also had begun to form a salon, she had borrowed Mme. Verdurin's mannerisms, and notably her tone of petulant autocracy. 'Toast' being as incomprehensible to me as 'Colombin's,' this further promise could not add to my temptation. It will appear stranger still, now that everyone uses such expressions—and perhaps even at Combray they are creeping in—that I had not at first understood of whom Mme. Swann was speaking when I heard her sing the praises of our old 'nurse.' I did not know any English; I gathered, however, as she went on that the word was intended to denote Françoise. I who, in the Champs-Elysées, had been so terrified of the bad impression that she must make, I now learned from Mme. Swann that it was all the things that Gilberte had told them about my 'nurse' that had attracted her husband and her to me. "One feels that she is so devoted to you; she must be nice!" (At once my opinion of Françoise was diametrically changed. By the same token, to have a governess equipped with a waterproof and a feather in her hat no longer appeared quite so essential.) Finally I learned from some words which Mme. Swann let fall with regard to Mme. Blatin (whose good nature she recognised but dreaded her visits) that personal relations with that lady would have been of less value to me than I had supposed, and would not in any way have improved my standing with the Swanns.

If I had now begun to explore, with tremors of reverence and joy the faery domain which, against all probability, had opened to me its hitherto locked approaches, this was still only in my capacity as a friend of Gilberte. The kingdom into which I was received was itself contained within another, more mysterious still, in which Swann and his wife led their supernatural existence and towards which they made their way, after taking my hand in theirs, when they crossed the hall at the same moment as myself but in the other direction. But soon I was to penetrate also to the heart of the Sanctuary. For instance, Gilberte might be out when I called, but M. or Mme. Swann was at home. They would ask who had rung, and on being told that it was myself would send out to ask me to come in for a moment and talk to them, desiring me to use in one way or another, and with this or that object in view, my influence over their daughter. I reminded myself of that letter, so complete, so convincing, which I had written to Swann only the other day, and which he had not deigned even to acknowledge. I marvelled at the impotence of the mind, the reason and the heart to effect the least conversion, to solve a single one of those difficulties which, in the sequel, life, without one's so much as knowing what steps it has taken, so easily unravels. My new position as the friend of Gilberte, endowed with an excellent influence over her, entitling me now to enjoy the same favours as if, having had as a companion at some school where they had always put me at the head of my class the son of a king, I had owed to that accident the right of informal entry into the palace and to audiences in the throne-room, Swann, with an infinite benevolence and as though he were not over-burdened with glorious occupations, would make me go into his library and there let me for an hour on end respond in stammered monosyllables, timid silences broken by brief and incoherent bursts of courage, to utterances of which my emotion prevented me from understanding a single word; would shew me works of art and books which he thought likely to interest me, things as to which I had no doubt, before seeing them, that they infinitely surpassed in beauty anything that the Louvre possessed or the National Library, but at which I found it impossible to look. At such moments I should have been grateful to Swann's butler, had he demanded from me my watch, my tie-pin, my boots, and made me sign a deed acknowledging him as my heir: in the admirable words of a popular expression of which, as of the most famous epics, we do not know who was the author, although, like those epics, and with all deference to Wolff and his theory, it most certainly had an author, one of those inventive, modest souls such as we come across every year, who light upon such gems as 'putting a name to a face,' though their own names they never let us learn, I did not know what I was doing. All the greater was my astonishment, when my visit was prolonged, at finding to what a zero of realisation, to what an absence of happy ending those hours spent in the enchanted dwelling led me. But my disappointment arose neither from the inadequacy of the works of art that were shewn to me nor from the impossibility of fixing upon them my distracted gaze. For it was not the intrinsic beauty of the objects themselves that made it miraculous for me to be sitting in Swann's library, it was the attachment to those objects—which might have been the ugliest in the world—of the particular feeling, melancholy and voluptuous, which I had for so many years localised in that room and which still impregnated it; similarly the multitude of mirrors, of silver-backed brushes, of altars to Saint Anthony of Padua, carved and painted by the most eminent artists, her friends, counted for nothing in the feeling of my own unworthiness and of her regal benevolence which was aroused in me when Mme. Swann received me for a moment in her own room, in which three beautiful and impressive creatures, her principal and second and third maids, smilingly prepared for her the most marvellous toilets, and towards which, on the order conveyed to me by the footman in knee-breeches that Madame wished to say a few words to me, I would make my way along the tortuous path of a corridor all embalmed, far and near, by the precious essences which exhaled without ceasing from her dressing-room a fragrance exquisitely sweet.

When Mme. Swann had returned to her visitors, we could still hear her talking and laughing, for even with only two people in the room, and as though she had to cope with all the 'good friends' at once, she would raise her voice, ejaculate her words, as she had so often in the 'little clan' heard its 'Mistress' do, at the moments when she 'led the conversation.' The expressions which we have borrowed from other people being those which, for a time at least, we are fondest of using, Mme. Swann used to select at one time those which she had learned from distinguished people whom her husband had not managed to prevent her from getting to know (it was from them that she derived the mannerism which consists in suppressing the article or demonstrative pronoun, in French, before an adjective qualifying a person's name), at another time others more plebeian (such as "It's a mere nothing!" the favourite expression of one of her friends), and used to make room for them in all the stories which, by a habit formed among the 'little clan,' she loved to tell about people. She would follow these up automatically with, "I do love that story!" or "Do admit, it's a very *good* story!" which came to her, through her husband, from the Guermantes, whom she did not know.

Mme. Swann had left the dining-room, but her husband, who had just returned home, made his appearance among us in turn. "Do you know if your mother is alone, Gilberte?" "No, Papa, she has still some people." "What, still? At seven o'clock! It's appalling! The poor woman must be absolutely dead. It's odious." (At home I had always heard the first syllable of this word pronounced with a long 'o,' like 'ode,' but M. and Mme. Swann made it short, as in 'odd.') "Just think of it; ever since two o'clock this afternoon!" he went on, turning to me. "And Camille tells me that between four and five he let in at least a dozen people. Did I say a dozen? I believe he told me fourteen. No, a dozen; I don't remember. When I came home I had quite forgotten it was her 'day,' and when I saw all those carriages outside the door I thought there must be a wedding in the house. And just now, while I've been in the library for a minute, the bell has never stopped ringing; upon my word, it's given me quite a headache. And are there a lot of them in there still?" "No; only two." "Who are they, do you know?" "Mme. Cottard and Mme. Bontemps." "Oh! the wife of the Chief Secretary to the Minister of Posts." "I know her husband's a clerk in some Ministry or other, but I don't know what he does." Gilberte assumed a babyish manner.

"What's that? You silly child, you talk as if you were two years old. What do you mean; 'a clerk in some Ministry or other' indeed! He is nothing less than Chief Secretary, chief of the whole show, and what's more—what on earth am I thinking of? Upon my word, I'm getting as stupid as yourself; he is not the Chief Secretary, he's the Permanent Secretary."

"I don't know, I'm sure; does that mean a lot, being Permanent Secretary?" answered Gilberte, who never let slip an opportunity of displaying her own indifference to anything that gave her parents cause for vanity. (She may, of course, have considered that she only enhanced the brilliance of such an acquaintance by not seeming to attach any undue importance to it.)

"I should think it did 'mean a lot'!" exclaimed Swann, who preferred to this modesty, which might have left me in doubt, a more explicit mode of speech. "Why it means simply that he's the first man after the Minister. In fact, he's more important than the Minister, because it is he that does all the work. Besides, it appears that he has immense capacity, a man quite of the first rank, a most distinguished individual. He's an Officer of the Legion of Honour. A delightful man, he is, and very good-looking too."

(This man's wife, incidentally, had married him against everyone's wishes and advice because he was a 'charming creature.' He had, what may be sufficient to constitute a rare and delicate whole, a fair, silky beard, good features, a nasal voice, powerful lungs and a glass eye.)

"I may tell you," he added, turning again to me, "that I am greatly amused to see that lot serving in the present Government, because they are Bontemps of the Bontemps-Chenut family, typical old-fashioned middle-class people, reactionary, clerical, tremendously strait-laced. Your grandfather knew quite well—at least by name and by sight he must have known old Chenut, the father, who never tipped the cabmen more than a ha'penny, though he was a rich enough man for those days, and the Baron Bréau-Chenut. All their money went in the Union Générale smash—you're too young to remember that, of course—and, gad! they've had to get it back as best they could."

"He's the uncle of a little girl who used to come to my lessons, in a class a long way below mine, the famous 'Albertine.' She's certain to be dreadfully 'fast' when she's older, but just now she's the quaintest spectacle."

"She is amazing, this daughter of mine. She knows everyone."

"I don't know her. I only used to see her going about, and hear them calling 'Albertine' here, and 'Albertine' there. But I do know Mme. Bontemps, and I don't like her much either."

"You are quite wrong; she is charming, pretty, intelligent. In fact, she's quite clever. I shall go in and say how d'e do to her, and ask her if her husband thinks we're going to have war, and whether we can rely on King Theodosius. He's bound to know, don't you think, since he's in the counsels of the gods."

It was not thus that Swann used to talk in days gone by; but which of us cannot call to mind some royal princess of limited intelligence who let herself be carried off by a footman, and then, ten years later, tried to get back into society, and found that people were not very willing to call upon her; have we not found her spontaneously adopting the language of all the old bores, and, when we referred to some duchess who was at the height of fashion, heard her say: "She came to see me only yesterday," or "I live a very quiet life." So that it is superfluous to make a study of manners, since we can deduce them all from psychological laws.

The Swanns shared this eccentricity of people who have not many friends; a visit, an invitation, a mere friendly word from some one ever so little prominent were for them events to which they aspired to give full publicity. If bad luck would have it that the Verdurins were in London when Odette gave a rather smart dinner-party, arrangements were made by which some common friend was to 'cable' a report to them across the Channel. Even the complimentary letters and telegrams received by Odette the Swanns were incapable of keeping to themselves. They spoke of them to their friends, passed them from hand to hand. Thus the Swanns' drawing-room reminded one of a seaside hotel where telegrams containing the latest news are posted up on a board.

Still, people who had known the old Swann not merely outside society, as I had known him, but in society, in that Guermantes set which, with certain concessions to Highnesses and Duchesses, was almost infinitely exacting in the matter of wit and charm, from which banishment was sternly decreed for men of real eminence whom its members found boring or vulgar,—such people might have been astonished to observe that their old Swann had ceased to be not only discreet when he spoke of his acquaintance, but difficult when he was called upon to enlarge it. How was it that Mme. Bontemps, so common, so ill-natured, failed to exasperate him? How could he possibly describe her as attractive? The memory of the Guermantes set must, one would suppose, have prevented him; as a matter of fact it encouraged him. There was certainly among the Guermantes, as compared with the great majority of groups in society, taste, indeed a refined taste, but also a snobbishness from which there arose the possibility of a momentary interruption in the exercise of that taste. If it were a question of some one who was not indispensable to their circle, of a Minister for Foreign Affairs, a Republican and inclined to be pompous, or of an Academician who talked too much, their taste would be brought to bear heavily against him, Swann would condole with Mme. de Guermantes on having had to sit next to such people at dinner at one of the Embassies, and they would a thousand times rather have a man of fashion, that is to say a man of the Guermantes kind, good for nothing, but endowed with the wit of the Guermantes, some one who was 'of the same chapel' as themselves. Only, a Grand Duchess, a Princess of the Blood, should she dine often with Mme. de Guermantes, would soon find herself enrolled in that chapel also, without having any right to be there, without being at all so endowed. But with the simplicity of people in society, from the moment they had her in their houses they went out of their way to find her attractive, since they were unable to say that it was because she was attractive that they invited her. Swann, coming to the rescue of Mme. de Guermantes, would say to her after the Highness had gone: "After all, she's not such a bad woman; really, she has quite a sense of the comic. I don't suppose for a moment that she has mastered the *Critique of Pure Reason*; still, she is not unattractive." "Oh, I do so entirely agree with you!" the Duchess would respond. "Besides, she was a little frightened of us all; you will see that she can be charming." "She is certainly a great deal less devastating than Mme. X——" (the wife of the talkative Academician, and herself a remarkable woman) "who quotes twenty volumes at you." "Oh, but there isn't any comparison between them." The faculty of saying such things as these, and of saying them sincerely, Swann had acquired from the Duchess, and had never lost. He made use of it now with reference to the people who came to his house. He forced himself to distinguish, and to admire in them the qualities that every human being will display if we examine him with a prejudice in his favour, and not with the distaste of the nice-minded; he extolled the merits of Mme. Bontemps, as he had once extolled those of the Princesse de Parme, who must have been excluded from the Guermantes set if there had not been privileged terms of admission for certain Highnesses, and if, when they presented themselves for election, no consideration had indeed been paid except to wit and charm. We have seen already, moreover, that Swann had always an inclination (which he was now putting into practice, only in a more lasting fashion) to exchange his social position for another which, in certain circumstances, might suit him better. It is only people incapable of analysing, in their perception, what at first sight appears indivisible who believe that one's position is consolidated with one's person. One and the same man, taken at successive points in his life, will be found to breathe, at different stages on the social ladder, in atmospheres that do not of necessity become more and more refined; whenever, in any period of our existence, we form or re-form associations with a certain environment, and feel that we can move at ease in it and are made comfortable, we begin quite naturally to make ourselves fast to it by putting out roots and tendrils.

In so far as Mme. Bontemps was concerned, I believe also that Swann, in speaking of her with so much emphasis, was not sorry to think that my parents would hear that she had been to see his wife. To tell the truth, in our house the names of the people whom Mme. Swann was gradually getting to know pricked our curiosity more than they aroused our admiration. At the name of Mme. Trombert, my mother exclaimed: "Ah! That's a new recruit, and one who will bring in others." And as though she found a similarity between the somewhat summary, rapid and violent manner in which Mme. Swann acquired her friends, as it were by conquest, and a Colonial expedition, Mamma went on to observe: "Now that the Tromberts have surrendered, the neighbouring tribes will not be long in coming in." If she had passed Mme. Swann in the street, she would tell us when she came home: "I saw Mme. Swann in all her war-paint; she must have been embarking on some triumphant offensive against the Massachutoes, or the Cingalese, or the Tromberts." And so with all the new people whom I told her that I had seen in that somewhat composite and artificial society, to which they had often been brought with great difficulty and from widely different surroundings, Mamma would at once divine their origin, and, speaking of them as of trophies dearly bought, would say: "Brought back from an Expedition against the so-and-so!"

As for Mme. Cottard, my father was astonished that Mme. Swann could find anything to be gained by getting so utterly undistinguished a woman to come to her house, and said: "In spite of the Professor's position, I must say that I cannot understand it." Mamma, on the other hand, understood quite well; she knew that a great deal of the pleasure which a woman finds in entering a class of society different from that in which she has previously lived would be lacking if she had no means of keeping her old associates informed of those others, relatively more brilliant, with whom she has replaced them. Therefore, she requires an eye-witness who may be allowed to penetrate this new, delicious world (as a buzzing, browsing insect bores its way into a flower) and will then, as the course of her visits may carry her, spread abroad, or so at least one hopes, with the tidings, a latent germ of envy and of wonder. Mme. Cottard, who might have been created on purpose to fill this part, belonged to that special category in a visiting list which Mamma (who inherited certain facets of her father's turn of mind) used to call the 'Tell Sparta' people. Besides—apart from another reason which did not come to our knowledge until many years later—Mme. Swann, in inviting this good-natured, reserved and modest friend, had no need to fear lest she might be introducing into her drawing-room, on her brilliant 'days,' a traitor or a rival. She knew what a vast number of homely blossoms that busy worker, armed with her plume and card-case, could visit in a single afternoon. She knew the creature's power of dissemination, and, basing her calculations upon the law of probability, was led to believe that almost certainly some intimate of the Verdurins would be bound to hear, within two or three days, how the Governor of Paris had left cards upon her, or that M. Verdurin himself would be told how M. Le Hault de Pressagny, the President of the Horse Show, had taken them, Swann and herself, to the King Theodosius gala; she imagined the Verdurins as informed of these two events, both so flattering to herself and of these alone, because the particular materialisations in which we embody and pursue fame are but few in number, by the default of our own minds which are incapable of imagining at one time all the forms which, none the less, we hope—in a general way—that fame will not fail simultaneously to assume for our benefit.

Mme. Swann had, however, met with no success outside what was called the 'official world.' Smart women did not go to her house. It was not the presence there of Republican 'notables' that frightened them away. In the days of my early childhood, conservative society was to the last degree worldly, and no 'good' house would ever have opened its doors to a Republican. The people who lived in such an atmosphere imagined that the impossibility of ever inviting an 'opportunist'—still more, a 'horrid radical'—to their parties was something that would endure for ever, like oil-lamps and horse-drawn omnibuses. But, like a kaleidoscope which is every now and then given a turn, society arranges successively in different orders elements which one would have supposed to be immovable, and composes a fresh pattern. Before I had made my first Communion, ladies on the 'right side' in politics had had the stupefaction of meeting, while paying calls, a smart Jewess. These new arrangements of the kaleidoscope are produced by what a philosopher would call a 'change of criterion.' The

Dreyfus case brought about another, at a period rather later than that in which I began to go to Mme. Swann's, and the kaleidoscope scattered once again its little scraps of colour. Everything Jewish, even the smart lady herself, fell out of the pattern, and various obscure nationalities appeared in its place. The most brilliant drawing-room in Paris was that of a Prince who was an Austrian and ultra-Catholic. If instead of the Dreyfus case there had come a war with Germany, the base of the kaleidoscope would have been turned in the other direction, and its pattern reversed. The Jews having shewn, to the general astonishment, that they were patriots also, would have kept their position, and no one would have cared to go any more, or even to admit that he had ever gone to the Austrian Prince's. All this does not, however, prevent the people who move in it from imagining, whenever society is stationary for the moment, that no further change will occur, just as in spite of having witnessed the birth of the telephone they decline to believe in the aeroplane. Meanwhile the philosophers of journalism are at work, castigating the preceding epoch, and not only the kind of pleasures in which it indulged, which seem to them to be the last word in corruption, but even the work of its artists and philosophers, which have no longer the least value in their eyes, as though they were indissolubly linked to the successive moods of fashionable frivolity. The one thing that does not change is that at any and every time it appears that there have been 'great changes.' At the time when I went to Mme. Swann's the Dreyfus storm had not yet broken, and some of the more prominent Jews were extremely powerful. None more so than Sir Rufus Israels, whose wife, Lady Israels, was Swann's aunt. She had not herself any intimate acquaintance so distinguished as her nephew's, while he, since he did not care for her, had never much cultivated her society, although he was, so far as was known, her heir. But she was the only one of Swann's relatives who had any idea of his social position, the others having always remained in the state of ignorance, in that respect, which had long been our own. When, from a family circle, one of its members emigrates into 'high society'—which to him appears a feat without parallel until after the lapse of a decade he observes that it has been performed in other ways and for different reasons by more than one of the men whom he knew as boys—he draws round about himself a zone of shadow, a *terra incognita,* which is clearly visible in its minutest details to all those who inhabit it with him, but is darkest night and nothingness to those who may not penetrate it but touch its fringe without the least suspicion of its existence in their midst. There being no news agency to furnish Swann's lady cousins with intelligence of the people with whom he consorted, it was (before his appalling marriage, of course) with a smile of condescension that they would tell one another, over family dinner-tables, that they had spent a 'virtuous' Sunday in going to see 'cousin Charles,' whom (regarding him as a 'poor relation' who was inclined to envy their prosperity,) they used wittily to name, playing upon the title of Balzac's story, *Le Cousin Bête*. Lady Israels, however, was letter-perfect in the names and quality of the people who lavished upon Swann a friendship of which she was frankly jealous. Her husband's family, which almost equalled the Rothschilds in importance, had for several generations managed the affairs of the Orleans Princes. Lady Israels, being immensely rich, exercised a wide influence, and had employed it so as to ensure that no one whom she knew should be 'at home' to Odette. One only had disobeyed her, in secret, the Comtesse de Marsantes. And then, as ill luck would have it, Odette having gone to call upon Mme. de Marsantes, Lady Israels had entered the room almost at her heels. Mme. de Marsantes was on tenter-hooks. With the craven impotence of those who are at liberty to act as they choose, she did not address a single word to Odette, who thus found little encouragement to press further the invasion of a world which, moreover, was not at all that into which she would have liked to be welcomed. In this complete detachment of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, Odette continued to be regarded as the illiterate 'light woman,' utterly different from the respectable ladies, 'well up' in all the minutest points of genealogy, who endeavoured to quench by reading biographies and memoirs their thirst for the aristocratic relations with which real life had omitted to provide them. And Swann, for his part, continued no doubt to be the lover in whose eyes all these peculiarities of an old mistress would appear lovable or at least inoffensive, for I have often heard his wife profess what were really social heresies, without his attempting (whether from lingering affection for her, loss of regard for society or weariness of the effort to make her perfect) to correct them. It was perhaps also another form of the simplicity which for so long had misled us at Combray, and which now had the effect that, while he continued to know, on his own account at least, many highly distinguished people, he did not make a point, in conversation in his wife's drawing-room, of our seeming to feel that they were of the smallest importance. They had, indeed, less than ever for Swann, the centre of gravity of his life having been displaced. In any case, Odette's ignorance of social distinctions was so dense that if the name of the Princesse de Guermantes were mentioned in conversation after that of the Duchess, her cousin, "So those ones are Princes, are they?" she would exclaim; "Why, they've gone up a step." Were anyone to say "the Prince," in speaking of the Duc de Chartres, she would put him right with, "The Duke, you mean; he is Duc de Chartres, not Prince." As for the Duc d'Orléans, son of the Comte de Paris: "That's funny; the son is higher than the father!" she would remark, adding, for she was afflicted with anglomania, "Those *Royalties* are so dreadfully confusing!"—while to someone who asked her from what province the Guermantes family came she replied, "From the Aisne."

But, so far as Odette was concerned, Swann was quite blind, not merely to these deficiencies in her education but to the general mediocrity of her intelligence. More than that; whenever Odette repeated a silly story Swann would sit listening to his wife with a complacency, a merriment, almost an admiration into which some survival of his desire for her must have entered; while in the same conversation, anything subtle, anything deep even that he himself might say would be listened to by Odette with an habitual lack of interest, rather curtly, with impatience, and would at times be sharply contradicted. And we must conclude that this enslavement of refinement by vulgarity is the rule in many households, when we think, conversely, of all the superior women who yield to the blandishments of a boor, merciless in his censure of their most delicate utterances, while they go into ecstasies, with the infinite indulgence of love, over the feeblest of his witticisms. To return to the reasons which prevented Odette, at this period, from making her way into the Faubourg Saint-Germain, it must be observed that the latest turn of the social kaleidoscope had been actuated by a series of scandals. Women to whose houses one had been going with entire confidence had been discovered to be common prostitutes, if not British spies. One would, therefore, for some time to come expect people (so, at least, one supposed) to be, before anything else, in a sound position, regular, settled, accountable. Odette represented simply everything with which one had just severed relations, and was incidentally to renew them at once (for men, their natures not altering from day to day, seek in every new order a continuance of the old) but to renew them by seeking it under another form which would allow one to be innocently taken in, and to believe that it was no longer the same society as before the disaster. However, the scapegoats of that society and Odette were too closely alike. People who move in society are very short-sighted; at the moment in which they cease to have any relations with the Israelite ladies whom they have known, while they are asking themselves how they are to fill the gap thus made in their lives, they perceive, thrust into it as by the windfall of a night of storm, a new lady, an Israelite also; but by virtue of her novelty she is not associated in their minds with her predecessors, with what they are convinced that they must abjure. She does not ask that they shall respect her God. They take her up. There was no question of anti-semitism at the time when I used first to visit Odette. But she was like enough to it to remind people of what they wished, for a while, to avoid.

As for Swann himself, he was still a frequent visitor of several of his former acquaintance, who, of course, were all of the very highest rank. And yet when he spoke to us of the people whom he had just been to see I noticed that, among those whom he had known in the old days, the choice that he made was dictated by the same kind of taste, partly artistic, partly historic, that inspired him as a collector. And remarking that it was often some great lady or other of waning reputation, who interested him because she had been the mistress of Liszt or because one of Balzac's novels was dedicated to her grandmother (as he would purchase a drawing if Chateaubriand had written about it) I conceived a suspicion that we had, at Combray, replaced one error, that of regarding Swann as a mere stockbroker, who did not go into society, by another, when we supposed him to be one of the smartest men in Paris. To be a friend of the Comte de Paris meant nothing at all. Is not the world full of such 'friends of Princes,' who would not be received in any house that was at all 'exclusive'? Princes know themselves to be princes, and are not snobs; besides, they believe themselves to be so far above everything that is not of their blood royal that great nobles and 'business men' appear, in the depths beneath them, to be practically on a level.

But Swann went farther than this; not content with seeking in society, such as it was, when he fastened upon the names which, inscribed upon its roll by the past, were still to be read there, a simple artistic and literary pleasure, he indulged in the slightly vulgar diversion of arranging as it were social nosegays by grouping heterogeneous elements, bringing together people taken at hazard, here, there and everywhere. These experiments in the lighter side (or what was to Swann the lighter side) of sociology did not stimulate an identical reaction, with any regularity, that is to say, in each of his wife's friends. "I'm thinking of asking the Cottards to meet the Duchesse de Vendôme," he would laughingly say to Mme. Bontemps, in the appetised tone of an epicure who has thought of, and intends to try the substitution, in a sauce, of cayenne pepper for cloves. But this plan, which was, in fact, to appear quite humorous, in an archaic sense of the word, to the Cottards, had also the power of infuriating Mme. Bontemps. She herself had recently been presented by the Swanns to the Duchesse de Vendôme, and had found this as agreeable as it seemed to her natural. The thought of winning renown from it at the Cottards', when she related to them what had happened, had been by no means the least savoury ingredient of her pleasure. But like those persons recently decorated who, their investiture once accomplished, would like to see the fountain of honour turned off at the main, Mme. Bontemps would have preferred that, after herself, no one else in her own circle of friends should be made known to the Princess. She denounced (to herself, of course) the licentious taste of Swann who, in order to gratify a wretched aesthetic whim, was obliging her to scatter to the winds, at one swoop, all the dust that she would have thrown in the eyes of the Cottards when she told them about the Duchesse de Vendôme. How was she even to dare to announce to her husband that the Professor and his wife were in their turn to partake of this pleasure, of which she had boasted to him as though it were unique. And yet, if the Cottards could only be made to know that they were being invited not seriously but for the amusement of their host! It is true that the Bontemps had been invited for the same reason, but Swann, having acquired from the aristocracy that eternal 'Don Juan' spirit which, in treating with two women of no importance, makes each of them believe that it is she alone who is seriously loved, had spoken to Mme. Bontemps of the Duchesse de Vendôme as of a person whom it was clearly laid down that she must meet at dinner. "Yes, we're determined to have the Princess here with the Cottards," said Mme. Swann a few weeks later; "My husband thinks that we might get something quite amusing out of that conjunction." For if she had retained from the 'little nucleus' certain habits dear to Mme. Verdurin, such as that of shouting things aloud so as to be heard by all the faithful, she made use, at the same time, of certain expressions, such as 'conjunction,' which were dear to the Guermantes circle, of which she thus felt unconsciously and at a distance, as the sea is swayed by the moon, the attraction, though without being drawn perceptibly closer to it. "Yes, the Cottards and the Duchesse de Vendôme. Don't you think that might be rather fun?" asked Swann. "I think they'll be exceedingly ill-assorted, and it can only lead to a lot of bother; people oughtn't to play with fire, is what I say!" snapped Mme. Bontemps, furious. She and her husband were, all the same, invited, as was the Prince d'Agrigente, to this dinner, which Mme. Bontemps and Cottard had each two alternative ways of describing, according to whom they were telling about it. To one set Mme. Bontemps for her part, and Cottard for his would say casually, when asked who else had been of the party: "Only the Prince d'Agrigente; it was all quite intimate." But there were others who might, alas, be better informed (once, indeed, some one had challenged Cottard with: "But weren't the Bontemps there too?" "Oh, I forgot them," Cottard had blushingly admitted to the tactless questioner whom he ever afterwards classified among slanderers and speakers of evil). For these the Bontemps and Cottards had each adopted, without any mutual arrangement, a version the framework of which was identical for both parties, their own names alone changing places. "Let me see;" Cottard would say, "there were our host and hostess, the Duc and Duchesse de Vendôme—" (with a satisfied smile) "Professor and Mme. Cottard, and, upon my soul, heaven only knows how they got there, for they were about as much in keeping as hairs in the soup, M. and Mme. Bontemps!" Mme. Bontemps would recite an exactly similar 'piece,' only it was M. and Mme. Bontemps who were named with a satisfied emphasis between the Duchesse de Vendôme and the Prince d'Agrigente, while the 'also ran,' whom finally she used to accuse of having invited themselves, and who completely spoiled the party, were the Cottards.

When he had been paying calls Swann would often come home with little time to spare before dinner. At that point in the evening, six o'clock, when in the old days he had felt so wretched, he no longer asked himself what Odette might be about, and was hardly at all concerned to hear that she had people still with her, or had gone out. He recalled at times that he had once, years ago, tried to read through its envelope a letter addressed by Odette to Forcheville. But this memory was not pleasing to him, and rather than plumb the depth of shame that he felt in it he preferred to indulge in a little grimace, twisting up the corners of his mouth and adding, if need be, a shake of the head which signified "What does it all matter?" In truth, he considered now that the hypothesis by which he had often been brought to a standstill in days gone by, according to which it was his jealous imagination alone that blackened what was in reality the innocent life of Odette—that this hypothesis (which after all was beneficent, since, so long as his amorous malady had lasted, it had diminished his sufferings by making them seem imaginary) was not the truth, that it was his jealousy that had seen things in the right light, and that if Odette had loved him better than he supposed, she had deceived him more as well. Formerly, while his sufferings were still keen, he had vowed that, as soon as he should have ceased to love Odette, and so to be afraid either of vexing her or of making her believe that he loved her more than he did, he would afford himself the satisfaction of elucidating with her, simply from his love of truth and as a historical point, whether or not she had had Forcheville in her room that day when he had rung her bell and rapped on her window without being let in, and she had written to Forcheville that it was an uncle of hers who had called. But this so interesting problem, of which he was waiting to attempt the solution only until his jealousy should have subsided, had precisely lost all interest in Swann's eyes when he had ceased to be jealous. Not immediately, however. He felt no other jealousy now with regard to Odette than what the memory of that day, that afternoon spent in knocking vainly at the little house in the Rue La Pérouse, had continued to excite in him; as though his jealousy, not dissimilar in that respect from those maladies which appear to have their seat, their centre of contagion less in certain persons than in certain places, in certain houses, had had for its object not so much Odette herself as that day, that hour in the irrevocable past when Swann had beaten at every entrance to her house in turn. You would have said that that day, that hour alone had caught and preserved a few last fragments of the amorous personality which had once been Swann's, and that there alone could he now recapture them. For a long time now it had made no matter to him that Odette had been false to him, and was false still. And yet he had continued for some years to seek out old servants of Odette, so strongly in him persisted the painful curiosity to know whether on that day, so long ago, at six o'clock, Odette had been in bed with Forcheville. Then that curiosity itself had disappeared, without, however, his abandoning his investigations. He continued the attempt to discover what no longer interested him, because his old ego though it had shrivelled to the extreme of decrepitude still acted mechanically, following the course of preoccupations so utterly abandoned that Swann could not now succeed even in forming an idea of that anguish—so compelling once that he had been unable to foresee his ever being delivered from it, that only the death of her whom he loved (death which, as will be shewn later on in this story, by a cruel example, in no way diminishes the sufferings caused by jealousy) seemed to him capable of making smooth the road, then insurmountably barred to him, of his life.

But to bring to light, some day, those passages in the life of Odette to which he owed his sufferings had not been Swann's only ambition; he had in reserve that also of wreaking vengeance for his sufferings when, being no longer in love with Odette, he should no longer be afraid of her; and the opportunity of gratifying this second ambition had just occurred, for Swann was in love with another woman, a woman who gave him—grounds for jealousy, no, but who did all the same make him jealous, because he was not capable, now, of altering his way of making love, and it was the way he had used with Odette that must serve him now for another. To make Swann's jealousy revive it was not essential that this woman should be unfaithful, it sufficed that for any reason she was separated from him, at a party for instance, where she was presumably enjoying herself. That was enough to reawaken in him the old anguish, that lamentable and inconsistent excrescence of his love, which held Swann ever at a distance from what she really was, like a yearning to attain the impossible (what this young woman really felt for him, the hidden longing that absorbed her days, the secret places of her heart), for between Swann and her whom he loved this anguish piled up an unyielding mass of already existing suspicions, having their cause in Odette, or in some other perhaps who had preceded Odette, allowing this now ageing lover to know his mistress of the moment only in the traditional and collective phantasm of the 'woman who made him jealous,' in which he had arbitrarily incarnated his new love. Often, however, Swann would charge his jealousy with the offence of making him believe in imaginary infidelities; but then he would remember that he had given Odette the benefit of the same argument and had in that been wrong. And so everything that the young woman whom he loved did in those hours when he was not with her appeared spoiled of its innocence in his eyes. But whereas at that other time he had made a vow that if ever he ceased to love her whom he did not then imagine to be his future wife, he would implacably exhibit to her an indifference that would at length be sincere, so as to avenge his pride that had so long been trampled upon by her—of those reprisals which he might now enforce without risk to himself (for what harm could it do him to be taken at his word and deprived of those intimate moments with Odette that had been so necessary to him once), of those reprisals he took no more thought; with his love had vanished the desire to shew that he was in love no longer. And he who, when he was suffering at the hands of Odette, would have looked forward so keenly to letting her see one day that he had fallen to a rival, now that he was in a position to do so took infinite precautions lest his wife should suspect the existence of this new love.

❦

It was not only in those tea-parties, on account of which I had formerly had the sorrow of seeing Gilberte leave me and go home earlier than usual, that I was henceforth to take part, but the engagements that she had with her mother, to go for a walk or to some afternoon party, which by preventing her from coming to the Champs-Elysées had deprived me of her, on those days when I loitered alone upon the lawn or stood before the wooden horses,—to these outings M. and Mme. Swann henceforth admitted me, I had a seat in their landau, and indeed it was me that they asked if I would rather go to the theatre, to a dancing lesson at the house of one of Gilberte's friends, to some social gathering given by friends of her parents (what Odette called 'a little meeting') or to visit the tombs at Saint-Denis.

On days when I was going anywhere with the Swanns I would arrive at the house in time for *déjeuner,* which Mme. Swann called 'le lunch'; as one was not expected before half-past twelve, while my parents in those days had their meal at a quarter past eleven, it was not until they had risen from the table that I made my way towards that sumptuous quarter, deserted enough at any hour, but more particularly just then, when everyone had gone indoors. Even on winter days of frost, if the weather held, tightening every few minutes the knot of a gorgeous necktie from Charvet's and looking to see that my varnished boots were not getting dirty, I would roam to and fro among the avenues, waiting until twenty-seven minutes past the hour. I could see from afar in the Swanns' little garden-plot the sunlight glittering like hoar frost from the bare-boughed trees. It is true that the garden boasted but a pair of them. The unusual hour presented the scene in a new light. Into these pleasures of nature (intensified by the suppression of habit and indeed by my physical hunger) the thrilling prospect of sitting down to luncheon with Mme. Swann was infused; it did not diminish them, but taking command of them trained them to its service; so that if, at this hour when ordinarily I did not perceive them, I seemed now to be discovering the fine weather, the cold, the wintry sunlight, it was all as a sort of preface to the creamed eggs, as a patina, a cool and coloured glaze applied to the decoration of that mystic chapel which was the habitation of Mme. Swann, and in the heart of which there were, by contrast, so much warmth, so many scents and flowers.

At half-past twelve I would finally make up my mind to enter that house which, like an immense Christmas stocking, seemed ready to bestow upon me supernatural delights. (The French name 'Noël' was, by the way, unknown to Mme. Swann and Gilberte, who had substituted for it the English 'Christmas,' and would speak of nothing but 'Christmas pudding,' what people had given them as 'Christmas presents' and of going away—the thought of which maddened me with grief—'for Christmas.' At home even, I should have thought it degrading to use the word 'Noël,' and always said 'Christmas,' which my father considered extremely silly.)

I encountered no one at first but a footman who after leading me through several large drawing-rooms shewed me into one that was quite small, empty, its windows beginning to dream already in the blue light of afternoon; I was left alone there in the company of orchids, roses and violets, which, like people who are kept waiting in a room beside you but do not know you, preserved a silence which their individuality as living things made all the more impressive, and received coldly the warmth of a glowing fire of coals, preciously displayed behind a screen of crystal, in a basin of white marble over which it spilled, now and again, its perilous rubies.

I had sat down, but I rose hurriedly on hearing the door opened; it was only another footman, and then a third, and the minute result that their vainly alarming entrances and exits achieved was to put a little more coal on the fire or water in the vases. They departed, I found myself alone, once that door was shut which Mme. Swann was surely soon going to open. Of a truth, I should have been less ill at ease in a magician's cave than in this little waiting-room where the fire appeared to me to be performing alchemical transmutations as in Klingsor's laboratory. Footsteps sounded afresh, I did not rise, it was sure to be just another footman; it was M. Swann. "What! All by yourself? What is one to do; that poor wife of mine has never been able to remember what time means! Ten minutes to one. She gets later every day. And you'll see, she will come sailing in without the least hurry, and imagine she's in heaps of time." And as he was still subject to neuritis, and as he was becoming a trifle ridiculous, the fact of possessing so unpunctual a wife, who came in so late from the Bois, forgot everything at her dressmaker's and was never in time for luncheon made Swann anxious for his digestion but flattered his self-esteem.

He shewed me his latest acquisitions and explained their interest to me, but my emotion, added to the unfamiliarity of being still without food at this hour, sweeping through my mind left it void, so that while able to speak I was incapable of hearing. Anyhow, so far as the works of art in Swann's possession were concerned, it was enough for me that they were contained in his house, formed a part there of the delicious hour that preceded luncheon. The Gioconda herself might have appeared there without giving me any more pleasure than one of Mme. Swann's indoor gowns, or her scent bottles.

I continued to wait, alone or with Swann, and often with Gilberte, come in to keep us company. The arrival of Mme. Swann, prepared for me by all those majestic apparitions, must (so it seemed to me) be something truly immense. I strained my ears to catch the slightest sound. But one never finds quite as high as one has been expecting a cathedral, a wave in a storm, a dancer's leap in the air; after those liveried footmen, suggesting the chorus whose processional entry upon the stage leads up to and at the same time diminishes the final appearance of the queen, Mme. Swann, creeping furtively in, with a little otter-skin coat, her veil lowered to cover a nose pink-tipped by the cold, did not fulfil the promises lavished, while I had been waiting, upon my imagination.

But if she had stayed at home all morning, when she arrived in the drawing-room she would be clad in a wrapper of *crêpe-de-Chine,* brightly coloured, which seemed to me more exquisite than any of her dresses.

Sometimes the Swanns decided to remain in the house all afternoon, and then, as we had had luncheon so late, very soon I must watch setting, beyond the garden-wall, the sun of that day which had seemed to me bound to be different from other days; then in vain might the servants bring in lamps of every size and shape, burning each upon the consecrated altar of a console, a card-table, a corner-cupboard, a bracket, as though for the celebration of some strange and secret rite; nothing extraordinary transpired in the conversation, and I went home disappointed, as one often is in one's childhood after the midnight mass.

But my disappointment was scarcely more than mental. I was radiant with happiness in this house where Gilberte, when she was still not with us, was about to appear and would bestow on me in a moment, and for hours to come, her speech, her smiling and attentive gaze, just as I had caught it, that first time, at Combray. At the most I was a trifle jealous when I saw her so often disappear into vast rooms above, reached by a private staircase. Obliged myself to remain in the drawing-room, like a man in love with an actress who is confined to his stall 'in front' and wonders anxiously what is going on behind the scenes, in the green-room, I put to Swann, with regard to this other part of the house questions artfully veiled, but in a tone from which I could not quite succeed in banishing the note of uneasiness. He explained to me that the place to which Gilberte had gone was the linen-room, offered himself to shew it to me, and promised me that whenever Gilberte had occasion to go there again he would insist upon her taking me with her. By these last words and the relief which they brought me Swann at once annihilated for me one of those terrifying interior perspectives at the end of which a woman with whom we are in love appears so remote. At that moment I felt for him an affection which I believed to be deeper than my affection for Gilberte. For he, being the master over his daughter, was giving her to me, whereas she, she withheld herself now and then, I had not the same direct control over her as I had indirectly through Swann. Besides, it was she whom I loved and could not, therefore look upon without that disturbance, without that desire for something more which destroys in us, in the presence of one whom we love, the sensation of loving.

As a rule, however, we did not stay indoors, we went out. Sometimes, before going to dress, Mme. Swann would sit down at the piano. Her lovely hands, escaping from the pink, or white, or, often, vividly coloured sleeves of her *crêpe-de-Chine* wrapper, drooped over the keys with that same melancholy which was in her eyes but was not in her heart. It was on one of those days that she happened to play me the part of Vinteuil's sonata that contained the little phrase of which Swann had been so fond. But often one listens and hears nothing, if it is a piece of music at all complicated to which one is listening for the first time. And yet when, later on, this sonata had been played over to me two or three times I found that I knew it quite well. And so it is not wrong to speak of hearing a thing for the first time. If one had indeed, as one supposes, received no impression from the first hearing, the second, the third would be equally 'first hearings' and there would be no reason why one should understand it any better after the tenth. Probably what is wanting, the first time, is not comprehension but memory. For our memory, compared to the complexity of the impressions which it has to face while we are listening, is infinitesimal, as brief as the memory of a man who in his sleep thinks of a thousand things and at once forgets them, or as that of a man in his second childhood who cannot recall, a minute afterwards, what one has just been saying to him. Of these multiple impressions our memory is not capable of furnishing us with an immediate picture. But that picture gradually takes shape, and, with regard to works which we have heard more than once, we are like the schoolboy who has read several times over before going to sleep a lesson which he supposed himself not to know, and finds that he can repeat it by heart next morning. It was only that I had not, until then, heard a note of the sonata, whereas Swann and his wife could make out a distinct phrase that was as far beyond the range of my perception as a name which one endeavours to recall and in place of which one discovers only a void, a void from which, an hour later, when one is not thinking about them, will spring of their own accord, in one continuous flight, the syllables that one has solicited in vain. And not only does one not seize at once and retain an impression of works that are really great, but even in the content of any such work (as befell me in the case of Vinteuil's sonata) it is the least valuable parts that one at first perceives. Thus it was that I was mistaken not only in thinking that this work held nothing further in store for me (so that for a long time I made no effort to hear it again) from the moment in which Mme. Swann had played over to me its most famous passage; I was in this respect as stupid as people are who expect to feel no astonishment when they stand in Venice before the front of Saint Mark's, because photography has already acquainted them with the outline of its domes. Far more than that, even when I had heard the sonata played from beginning to end, it remained almost wholly invisible to me, like a monument of which its distance or a haze in the atmosphere allows us to catch but a faint and fragmentary glimpse. Hence the depression inseparable from one's knowledge of such works, as of everything that acquires reality in time. When the least obvious beauties of Vinteuil's sonata were revealed to me, already, borne by the force of habit beyond the reach of my sensibility, those that I had from the first distinguished and preferred in it were beginning to escape, to avoid me. Since I was able only in successive moments to enjoy all the pleasures that this sonata gave me, I never possessed it in its entirety: it was like life itself. But, less disappointing than life is, great works of art do not begin by giving us all their best. In Vinteuil's sonata the beauties that one discovers at once are those also of which one most soon grows tired, and for the same reason, no doubt, namely that they are less different from what one already knows. But when those first apparitions have withdrawn, there is left for our enjoyment some passage which its composition, too new and strange to offer anything but confusion to our mind, had made indistinguishable and so preserved intact; and this, which we have been meeting every day and have not guessed it, which has thus been held in reserve for us, which by the sheer force of its beauty has become invisible and has remained unknown, this comes to us last of all. But this also must be the last that we shall relinquish. And we shall love it longer than the rest because we have taken longer to get to love it. The time, moreover, that a person requires—as I required in the matter of this sonata—to penetrate a work of any depth is merely an epitome, a symbol, one might say, of the years, the centuries even that must elapse before the public can begin to cherish a masterpiece that is really new. So that the man of genius, to shelter himself from the ignorant contempt of the world, may say to himself that, since one's contemporaries are incapable of the necessary detachment, works written for posterity should be read by posterity alone, like certain pictures which one cannot appreciate when one stands too close to them. But, as it happens, any such cowardly precaution to avoid false judgments is doomed to failure; they are inevitable. The reason for which a work of genius is not easily admired from the first is that the man who has created it is extraordinary, that few other men resemble him. It was Beethoven's Quartets themselves (the Twelfth, Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth) that devoted half a century to forming, fashioning and enlarging a public for Beethoven's Quartets, marking in this way, like every great work of art, an advance if not in artistic merit at least in intellectual society, largely composed to-day of what was not to be found when the work first appeared, that is to say of persons capable of enjoying it. What artists call posterity is the posterity of the work of art. It is essential that the work (leaving out of account, for brevity's sake, the contingency that several men of genius may at the same time be working along parallel lines to create a more instructed public in the future, a public from which other men of genius shall reap the benefit) shall create its own posterity. For if the work were held in reserve, were revealed only to posterity, that audience, for that particular work, would be not posterity but a group of contemporaries who were merely living half-a-century later in time. And so it is essential that the artist (and this is what Vinteuil had done), if he wishes his work to be free to follow its own course, shall launch it, wherever he may find sufficient depth, confidently outward bound towards the future. And yet this interval of time, the true perspective in which to behold a work of art, if leaving it out of account is the mistake made by bad judges, taking it into account is at times a dangerous precaution of the good. No doubt one can easily imagine, by an illusion similar to that which makes everything on the horizon appear equidistant, that all the revolutions which have hitherto occurred in painting or in music did at least shew respect for certain rules, whereas that which immediately confronts us, be it impressionism, a striving after discord, an exclusive use of the Chinese scale, cubism, futurism or what you will, differs outrageously from all that have occurred before. Simply because those that have occurred before we are apt to regard as a whole, forgetting that a long process of assimilation has melted them into a continuous substance, varied of course but, taking it as a whole, homogeneous, in which Hugo blends with Molière. Let us try to imagine the shocking incoherence that we should find, if we did not take into account the future, and the changes that it must bring about, in a horoscope of our own riper years, drawn and presented to us in our youth. Only horoscopes are not always accurate, and the necessity, when judging a work of art, of including the temporal factor in the sum total of its beauty introduces, to our way of thinking, something as hazardous, and consequently as barren of interest, as every prophecy the non-fulfilment of which will not at all imply any inadequacy on the prophet's part, for the power to summon possibilities into existence or to exclude them from it is not necessarily within the competence of genius; one may have had genius and yet not have believed in the future of railways or of flight, or, although a brilliant psychologist, in the infidelity of a mistress or of a friend whose treachery persons far less gifted would have foreseen.

If I did not understand the sonata, it enchanted me to hear Mme. Swann play. Her touch appeared to me (like her wrappers, like the scent of her staircase, her cloaks, her chrysanthemums) to form part of an individual and mysterious whole, in a world infinitely superior to that in which the mind is capable of analysing talent. "Attractive, isn't it, that Vinteuil sonata?" Swann asked me. "The moment when night is darkening among the trees, when the arpeggios of the violin call down a cooling dew upon the earth. You must admit that it is rather charming; it shews all the static side of moonlight, which is the essential part. It is not surprising that a course of radiant heat such as my wife is taking, should act on the muscles, since moonlight can prevent the leaves from stirring. That is what he expresses so well in that little phrase, the Bois de Boulogne plunged in a cataleptic trance. By the sea it is even more striking, because you have there the faint response of the waves, which, of course, you can hear quite distinctly, since nothing else dares to move. In Paris it is the other way; at the most, you may notice unfamiliar lights among the old buildings, the sky brightened as though by a colourless and harmless conflagration, that sort of vast variety show of which you get a hint here and there. But in Vinteuil's little phrase, and in the whole sonata for that matter, it is not like that; the scene is laid in the Bois; in the *gruppetto* you can distinctly hear a voice saying: 'I can almost see to read the paper!' " These words from Swann might have falsified, later on, my impression of the sonata, music being too little exclusive to inhibit absolutely what other people suggest that we should find in it. But I understood from other words which he let fall that this nocturnal foliage was simply that beneath whose shade in many a restaurant on the outskirts of Paris he had listened on many an evening to the little phrase. In place of the profound significance that he had so often sought in it, what it recalled now to Swann were the leafy boughs, arranged, wreathed, painted round about it (which it gave him the desire to see again because it seemed to him to be their inner, their hidden self, as it were their soul); was the whole of one spring season which he had not been able to enjoy before, not having had—feverish and moody as he then was—enough strength of body and mind for its enjoyment, which, as one puts by for an invalid the dainties that he has not been able to eat, it had kept in store for him. The charm that he had been made to feel by certain evenings in the Bois, a charm of which Vinteuil's sonata served to remind him, he could not have recaptured by questioning Odette, although she, as well as the little phrase, had been his companion there. But Odette had been merely his companion, by his side, not (as the phrase had been) within him, and so had seen nothing—nor would she, had she been a thousand times as comprehending, have seen anything of that vision which for no one among us (or at least I was long under the impression that this rule admitted no exception) can be made externally visible. "It is rather charming, don't you think," Swann continued, "that sound can give a reflection, like water, or glass. It is curious, too, that Vinteuil's phrase now shews me only the things to which I paid no attention then. Of my troubles, my loves of those days it recalls nothing, it has altered all my values." "Charles, I don't think that's very polite to me, what you're saying." "Not polite? Really, you women are superb! I was simply trying to explain to this young man that what the music shews—to me, at least—is not for a moment 'Free-will' or 'In Tune with the Infinite,' but shall we say old Verdurin in his frock coat in the palm-house at the Jardin d'Acclimatation. Hundreds of times, without my leaving this room, the little phrase has carried me off to dine with it at Armenonville. Gad, it is less boring, anyhow, than having to go there with Mme. de Cambremer." Mme. Swann laughed. "That is a lady who is supposed to have been violently in love with Charles," she explained, in the same tone in which, shortly before, when we were speaking of Vermeer of Delft, of whose existence I had been surprised to find her conscious, she had answered me with: "I ought to explain that M. Swann was very much taken up with that painter at the time he was courting me. Isn't that so, Charles dear?" "You're not to start saying things about Mme. de Cambremer!" Swann checked her, secretly flattered. "But I'm only repeating what I've been told. Besides, it seems that she's an extremely clever woman; I don't know her myself. I believe she's very pushing, which surprises me rather in a clever woman. But everyone says that she was quite mad about you; there's no harm in repeating that." Swann remained silent as a deaf-mute which was in a way a confirmation of what she had said, and a proof of his own fatuity. "Since what I'm playing reminds you of the Jardin d'Acclimatation," his wife went on, with a playful semblance of being offended, "we might take him there some day in the carriage, if it would amuse him. It's lovely there just now, and you can recapture your fond impressions! Which reminds me, talking of the Jardin d'Acclimatation, do you know, this young man thought that we were devotedly attached to a person whom I cut, as a matter of fact, whenever I possibly can, Mme. Blatin! I think it is rather crushing for us, that she should be taken for a friend of ours. Just fancy, dear Dr. Cottard, who never says a harsh word about anyone, declares that she's positively contagious." "A frightful woman! The one thing to be said for her is that she is exactly like Savonarola. She is the very image of that portrait of Savonarola, by Fra Bartolomeo." This mania which Swann had for finding likenesses to people in pictures was defensible, for even what we call individual expression is—as we so painfully discover when we are in love and would fain believe in the unique reality of the beloved—something diffused and general, which can be found existing at different periods. But if one had listened to Swann, the processions of the Kings of the East, already so anachronistic when Benozzo Gozzoli introduced in their midst various Medici, would have been even more so, since they would have included the portraits of a whole crowd of men, contemporaries not of Gozzoli but of Swann, subsequent, that is to say not only by fifteen centuries to the Nativity but by four more to the painter himself. There was not missing from those trains, according to Swann, a single living Parisian of any note, any more than there was from that act in one of Sardou's plays, in which, out of friendship for the author and for the leading lady, and also because it was the fashion, all the best known men in Paris, famous doctors, politicians, barristers, amused themselves, each on a different evening, by 'walking on.' "But what has she got to do with the Jardin d'Acclimatation?" "Everything!" "What? You don't suggest that she's got a sky-blue behind, like the monkeys?" "Charles, you really are too dreadful! I was thinking of what the Cingalese said to her. Do tell him, Charles; it really is a gem." "Oh, it's too silly. You know, Mme. Blatin loves asking people questions, in a tone which she thinks friendly, but which is really overpowering." "What our good friends on the Thames call 'patronising,' " interrupted Odette. "Exactly. Well, she went the other day to the Jardin d'Acclimatation, where they have some blackamoors—Cingalese, I think I heard my wife say; she is much 'better up' in ethnology than I am." "Now, Charles, you're not to make fun of poor me." "I've no intention of making fun, I assure you. Well, to continue, she went up to one of these black fellows with 'Good morning, nigger!' . . ." "Oh, it's too absurd!" "Anyhow, this classification seems to have displeased the black. 'Me nigger,' he shouted (quite furious, don't you know), to Mme.

Blatin, 'me nigger; you, old cow!'" "I do think that's so delightful! I adore that story. Do say it's a good one. Can't you see old Blatin standing there, and hearing him: 'Me nigger; you, old cow'?" I expressed an intense desire to go there and see these Cingalese, one of whom had called Mme. Blatin an old cow. They did not interest me in the least. But I reflected that in going to the Jardin d'Acclimatation, and again on our way home, we should pass along that Allée des Acacias in which I had loved so, once, to gaze on Mme. Swann, and that perhaps Coquelin's mulatto friend, to whom I had never managed to exhibit myself in the act of saluting her, would see me there, seated at her side, as the victoria swept by.

During those minutes in which Gilberte, having gone to 'get ready,' was not in the room with us, M. and Mme. Swann would take delight in revealing to me all the rare virtues of their child. And everything that I myself observed seemed to prove the truth of what they said. I remarked that, as her mother had told me, she had not only for her friends but for the servants, for the poor, the most delicate attentions carefully thought out, a desire to give pleasure, a fear of causing annoyance, translated into all sorts of trifling actions which must often have meant great inconvenience to her. She had done some 'work' for our stall-keeper in the Champs-Elysées, and went out in the snow to give it to her with her own hands, so as not to lose a day. "You have no idea how kind-hearted she is, she won't let it be seen," her father assured me. Young as she was, she appeared far more sensible already than her parents. When Swann boasted of his wife's grand friends Gilberte would turn away, and remain silent, but without any air of reproaching him, for it seemed inconceivable to her that her father could be subjected to the slightest criticism. One day, when I had spoken to her of Mlle. Vinteuil, she said to me:

"I shall never know her, for a very good reason, and that is that she was not nice to her father, by what one hears, she gave him a lot of trouble. You can't understand that any more than I, can you; I'm sure you could no more live without your papa than I could, which is quite natural after all. How can one ever forget a person one has loved all one's life?"

And once when she was making herself particularly endearing to Swann, as I mentioned this to her when he was out of the room:

"Yes, poor Papa, it is the anniversary of his father's death, just now. You can understand what he must be feeling; you do understand, don't you; you and I feel the same about things like that. So I just try to be a little less naughty than usual." "But he doesn't ever think you naughty. He thinks you're quite perfect." "Poor Papa, that's because he's far too good himself."

But her parents were not content with singing the praises of Gilberte—that same Gilberte, who, even, before I had set eyes on her, used to appear to me standing before a church, in a landscape of the Ile de France, and later, awakening in me not dreams now but memories, was embowered always in a hedge of pink hawthorn, in the little lane that I took when I was going the Méséglise way. Once when I had asked Mme. Swann (and had made an effort to assume the indifferent tone of a friend of the family, curious to know the preferences of a child), which among all her playmates Gilberte liked the best, Mme. Swann replied: "But you ought to know a great deal better than I do. You are in her confidence, her great favourite, her 'chum,' as the English say."

It appears that in a coincidence as perfect as this was, when reality is folded over to cover the ideal of which we have so long been dreaming, it completely hides that ideal, absorbing it in itself, as when two geometrical figures that are congruent are made to coincide, so that there is but one, whereas we would rather, so as to give its full significance to our enjoyment, preserve for all those separate points of our desire, at the very moment in which we succeed in touching them, and so as to be quite certain that they are indeed themselves, the distinction of being intangible. And our thought cannot even reconstruct the old state so as to confront the new with it, for it has no longer a clear field: the acquaintance that we have made, the memory of those first, unhoped-for moments, the talk to which we have listened are there now to block the passage of our consciousness, and as they control the outlets of our memory far more than those of our imagination, they react more forcibly upon our past, which we are no longer able to visualise without taking them into account, than upon the form, still unshaped, of our future. I had been able to believe, year after year, that the right to visit Mme. Swann was a vague and fantastic privilege to which I should never attain; after I had spent a quarter of an hour in her drawing-room, it was the period in which I did not yet know her that was become fantastic and vague like a possibility which the realisation of an alternative possibility has made impossible. How was I ever to dream again of her dining-room as of an inconceivable place, when I could not make the least movement in my mind without crossing the path of that inextinguishable ray cast backwards to infinity, even into my own most distant past, by the lobster *à l'Américaine* which I had just been eating? And Swann must have observed in his own case a similar phenomenon; for this house in which he entertained me might be regarded as the place into which had flowed, to coincide and be lost in one another, not only the ideal dwelling that my imagination had constructed, but another still, that which his jealous love, as inventive as any fantasy of mine, had so often depicted to him, that dwelling common to Odette and himself which had appeared so inaccessible once, on evenings when Odette had taken him home with Forcheville to drink orangeade with her; and what had flowed in to be absorbed, for him, in the walls and furniture of the dining-room in which we now sat down to luncheon was that unhoped-for paradise in which, in the old days, he could not without a pang imagine that he would one day be saying to *their* butler those very words, "Is Madame ready yet?" which I now heard him utter with a touch of impatience mingled with self-satisfaction. No more than, probably, Swann himself could I succeed in knowing my own happiness, and when Gilberte once broke out: "Who would ever have said that the little girl you watched playing prisoners' base, without daring to speak to her, would one day be your greatest friend, and you would go to her house whenever you liked?" she spoke of a change the occurrence of which I could verify only by observing it from without, finding no trace of it within myself, for it was composed of two separate states on both of which I could not, without their ceasing to be distinct from one another, succeed in keeping my thoughts fixed at one and the same time.

And yet this house, because it had been so passionately desired by Swann, must have kept for him some of its attraction, if I was to judge by myself for whom it had not lost all its mystery. That singular charm in which I had for so long supposed the life of the Swanns to be bathed I had not completely exorcised from their house on making my own way into it; I had made it, that charm, recoil, overpowered as it must be by the sight of the stranger, the pariah that I had been, to whom now Mme. Swann pushed forward graciously for him to sit in it an armchair exquisite, hostile, scandalised; but all round me that charm, in my memory, I can still distinguish. Is it because, on those days on which M. and Mme. Swann invited me to luncheon, to go out afterwards with them and Gilberte, I imprinted with my gaze,—while I sat waiting for them there alone—on the carpet, the sofas, the tables, the screens, the pictures, the idea engraved upon my mind that Mme. Swann, or her husband, or Gilberte was about to enter the room? Is it because those objects have dwelt ever since in my memory side by side with the Swanns, and have gradually acquired something of their personal character? Is it because, knowing that the Swanns passed their existence among all those things, I made of all of them as it were emblems of the private lives, of those habits of the Swanns from which I had too long been excluded for them not to continue to appear strange to me, even when I was allowed the privilege of sharing in them? However it may be, always when I think of that drawing-room which Swann (not that the criticism implied on his part any intention to find fault with his wife's taste) found so incongruous—because, while it was still planned and carried out in the style, half conservatory, half studio, which had been that of the rooms in which he had first known Odette, she had, none the less, begun to replace in its medley a quantity of the Chinese ornaments, which she now felt to be rather gimcrack, a trifle dowdy, by a swarm of little chairs and stools and things upholstered in old Louis XIV silks; not to mention the works of art brought by Swann himself from his house on the Quai d'Orléans—it has kept in my memory, on the contrary, that composite, heterogeneous room, a cohesion, a unity, an individual charm never possessed even by the most complete, the least spoiled of such collections that the past has bequeathed to us, or the most modern, alive and stamped with the imprint of a living personality; for we alone can, by our belief that they have an existence of their own, give to certain of the things that we see a soul which they afterwards keep, which they develop in our minds. All the ideas that I had formed of the hours, different from those that exist for other men, passed by the Swanns in that house which was to their life what the body is to the soul, and must give expression to its singularity, all those ideas were rearranged, amalgamated—equally disturbing and indefinite throughout—in the arrangement of the furniture, the thickness of the carpets, the position of the windows, the ministrations of the servants. When, after luncheon, we went in the sunshine to drink our coffee in the great bay window of the drawing-room, while Mme. Swann was asking me how many lumps of sugar I took, it was not only the silk-covered stool which she pushed towards me that emitted, with the agonising charm that I had long ago felt—first among the pink hawthorn and then beside the clump of laurels—in the name of Gilberte, the hostility that her parents had shewn to me, which this little piece of furniture seemed to have so well understood, to have so completely shared that I felt myself unworthy, and found myself almost reluctant to set my feet on its defenceless cushion; a personality, a soul was latent there which linked it secretly to the light of two o'clock in the afternoon, so different from any other light, in the gulf in which there played about our feet its sparkling tide of gold out of which the bluish crags of sofas and vaporous carpet beaches emerged like enchanted islands; and there was nothing, even to the painting by Rubens hung above the chimney-piece, that was not endowed with the same quality and almost the same intensity of charm as the laced boots of M. Swann, and that hooded cape, the like of which I had so dearly longed to wear, whereas now Odette would beg her husband to go and put on another, so as to appear more smart, whenever I did them the honour of driving out with them. She too went away to change her dress—not heeding my protestations that no 'outdoor' clothes could be nearly so becoming as the marvellous garment of *crêpe-de-Chine* or silk, old rose, cherry-coloured, Tiepolo pink, white, mauve, green, red or yellow, plain or patterned, in which Mme. Swann had sat down to luncheon and which she was now going to take off. When I assured her that she ought to go out in that costume, she laughed, either in scorn of my ignorance or from delight in my compliment. She apologised for having so many wrappers, explaining that they were the only kind of dress in which she felt comfortable, and left us, to go and array herself in one of those regal toilets which imposed their majesty on all beholders, and yet among which I was sometimes summoned to decide which of them I preferred that she should put on.

In the Jardin d'Acclimatation, how proud I was when we had left the carriage to be walking by the side of Mme. Swann! While she strolled carelessly on, letting her cloak stream on the air behind her, I kept eyeing her with an admiring gaze to which she coquettishly responded in a lingering smile. And now, were we to meet one or other of Gilberte's friends, boy or girl, who saluted us from afar, I would in my turn be looked upon by them as one of those happy creatures whose lot I had envied, one of those friends of Gilberte who knew her family and had a share in that other part of her life, the part which was not spent in the Champs-Elysées.

Often upon the paths of the Bois or the Jardin we passed, we were greeted by some great lady who was Swann's friend, whom he perchance did not see, so that his wife must rally him with a "Charles! Don't you see Mme. de Montmorency?" And Swann, with that amicable smile, bred of a long and intimate friendship, bared his head, but with a slow sweeping gesture, with a grace peculiarly his own. Sometimes the lady would stop, glad of an opportunity to shew Mme. Swann a courtesy which would involve no tiresome consequences, by which they all knew that she would never seek to profit, so thoroughly had Swann trained her in reserve. She had none the less acquired all the manners of polite society, and however smart, however stately the lady might be, Mme. Swann was invariably a match for her; halting for a moment before the friend whom her husband had recognised and was addressing, she would introduce us, Gilberte and myself, with so much ease of manner, would remain so free, so tranquil in her exercise of courtesy, that it would have been hard to say, looking at them both, which of the two was the aristocrat. The day on which we went to inspect the Cingalese, on our way home we saw coming in our direction, and followed by two others who seemed to be acting as her escort, an elderly but still attractive woman cloaked in a dark mantle and capped with a little bonnet tied beneath her chin with a pair of ribbons. "Ah! Here is someone who will interest you!" said Swann. The old lady, who had come within a few yards of us, now smiled at us with a caressing sweetness. Swann doffed his hat. Mme. Swann swept to the ground in a curtsey and made as if to kiss the hand of the lady, who, standing there like a Winterhalter portrait, drew her up again and kissed her cheek. "There, there; will you put your hat on, you!" she scolded Swann in a thick and almost growling voice, speaking like an old and familiar friend. "I am going to present you to Her Imperial Highness," Mme. Swann whispered. Swann drew me aside for a moment while his wife talked of the weather and of the animals recently added to the Jardin d'Acclimatation, with the Princess. "That is the Princesse Mathilde," he told me; "you know who' I mean, the friend of Flaubert, Sainte-Beuve, Dumas. Just fancy, she's the niece of Napoleon I. She had offers of marriage from Napoleon III and the Emperor of Russia. Isn't that interesting? Talk to her a little. But I hope she won't keep us standing here for an hour! . . . I met Taine the other day," he went on, addressing the Princess, "and he told me that your Highness was vexed with him." "He's behaved like a perfect peeg!" she said gruffly, pronouncing the word *cochon* as though she referred to Joan of Arc's contemporary, Bishop Cauchon. "After his article on the Emperor I left my card on him with p. p. c. on it." I felt the surprise that one feels on opening the Correspondence of that Duchesse d'Orléans who was by birth a Princess Palatine. And indeed Princesse Mathilde, animated by sentiments so entirely French, expressed them with a straightforward bluntness that recalled the Germany of an older generation, and was inherited, doubtless, from her Württemberg mother. This somewhat rude and almost masculine frankness she softened, as soon as she began to smile, with an Italian languor. And the whole person was clothed in a dress so typically 'Second Empire' that—for all that the Princess wore it simply and solely, no doubt, from attachment to the fashions that she had loved when she was young—she seemed to have deliberately planned to avoid the slightest discrepancy in historic colour, and to be satisfying the expectations of those who looked to her to evoke the memory of another age. I whispered to Swann to ask her whether she had known Musset. "Very slightly, sir," was the answer, given in a tone which seemed to feign annoyance at the question, and of course it was by way of a joke that she called Swann

'Sir,' since they were intimate friends. "I had him to dine once. I had invited him for seven o'clock. At half-past seven, as he had not appeared, we sat down to dinner. He arrived at eight, bowed to me, took his seat, never opened his lips, went off after dinner without letting me hear the sound of his voice. Of course, he was dead drunk. That hardly encouraged me to make another attempt." We were standing a little way off, Swann and I. "I hope this little audience is not going to last much longer," he muttered, "the soles of my feet are hurting. I cannot think why my wife keeps on making conversation. When we get home it will be she that complains of being tired, and she knows I simply cannot go on standing like this." For Mme. Swann, who had had the news from Mme. Bontemps, was in the course of telling the Princess that the Government, having at last begun to realise the depth of its depravity, had decided to send her an invitation to be present on the platform in a few days' time, when the Tsar Nicholas was to visit the Invalides. But the Princess who, in spite of appearances, in spite of the character of her circle, which consisted mainly of artists and literary people, had remained at heart and shewed herself, whenever she had to take action, the niece of Napoleon, replied: "Yes, Madame, I received it this morning, and I sent it back to the Minister, who must have had it by now. I told him that I had no need of an invitation to go to the Invalides. If the Government desires my presence there, it will not be on the platform, it will be in our vault, where the Emperor's tomb is. I have no need of a card to admit me there. I have my keys. I go in and out when I choose. The Government has only to let me know whether it wishes me to be present or not. But if I do go to the Invalides, it will be down below there or nowhere at all." At that moment we were saluted, Mme. Swann and I, by a young man who greeted her without stopping, and whom I was not aware that she knew; it was Bloch. I inquired about him, and was told that he had been introduced to her by Mme. Bontemps, and that he was employed in the Minister's secretariat, which was news to me. Anyhow, she could not have seen him often—or perhaps she had not cared to utter the name, hardly 'smart' enough for her liking, of Bloch, for she told me that he was called M. Moreul. I assured her that she was mistaken, that his name was Bloch. The Princess gathered up the train that flowed out behind her, while Mme. Swann gazed at it with admiring eyes. "It is only a fur that the Emperor of Russia sent me," she explained, "and as I have just been to see him I put it on, so as to shew him that I'd managed to have it made up as a mantle." "I hear that Prince Louis has joined the Russian Army; the Princess will be very sad at losing him," went on Mme. Swann, not noticing her husband's signals of distress. "That was a fine thing to do. As I said to him, 'Just because there's been a soldier, before, in the family, that's no reason!' " replied the Princess, alluding with this abrupt simplicity to Napoleon the Great. But Swann could hold out no longer. "Ma'am, it is I that am going to play the Prince, and ask your permission to retire; but, you see, my wife has not been so well, and I do not like her to stand still for any time." Mme. Swann curtseyed again, and the Princess conferred upon us all a celestial smile, which she seemed to have summoned out of the past, from among the graces of her girlhood, from the evenings at Compiègne, a smile which glided, sweet and unbroken, over her hitherto so sullen face; then she went on her way, followed by the two ladies in waiting, who had confined themselves, in the manner of interpreters, of children's or invalids' nurses, to punctuating our conversation with insignificant sentences and superfluous explanations. "You should go and write your name in her book, one day this week," Mme. Swann counselled me. "One doesn't leave cards upon these 'Royalties,' as the English call them, but she will invite you to her house if you put your name down."

Sometimes in those last days of winter we would go, before proceeding on our expedition, into one of the small picture-shows that were being given at that time, where Swann, as a collector of mark, was greeted with special deference by the dealers in whose galleries they were held. And in that still wintry weather the old longing to set out for the South of France and Venice would be reawakened in me by those rooms in which a springtime, already well advanced, and a blazing sun cast violet shadows upon the roseate Alpilles and gave the intense transparency of emeralds to the Grand Canal. If the weather were inclement, we would go to a concert or a theatre, and afterwards to one of the fashionable tearooms. There, whenever Mme. Swann had anything to say to me which she did not wish the people at the next table, or even the waiters who brought our tea, to understand, she would say it in English, as though that had been a secret language known to our two selves alone. As it happened everyone in the place knew English—I only had not yet learned the language, and was obliged to say so to Mme. Swann in order that she might cease to make, on the people who were drinking tea or were serving us with it, remarks which I guessed to be uncomplimentary without either my understanding or the person referred to losing a single word.

Once, in the matter of an afternoon at the theatre, Gilberte gave me a great surprise. It was precisely the day of which she had spoken to me some time back, on which fell the anniversary of her grandfather's death. We were to go, she and I, with her governess, to hear selections from an opera, and Gilberte had dressed with a view to attending this performance, and wore the air of indifference with which she was in the habit of treating whatever we might be going to do, with the comment that it might be anything in the world, no matter what, provided that it amused me and had her parents' approval. Before luncheon, her mother drew us aside to tell us that her father was vexed at the thought of our going to a theatre on that day. This seemed to me only natural. Gilberte remained impassive, but grew pale with an anger which she was unable to conceal; still she uttered not a word. When M. Swann joined us his wife took him to the other end of the room and said something in his ear. He called Gilberte, and they went together into the next room. We could hear their raised voices. And yet I could not bring myself to believe that Gilberte, so submissive, so loving, so thoughtful, would resist her father's appeal, on such a day and for so trifling a matter. At length Swann reappeared with her, saying: "You heard what I said. Now you may do as you like."

Gilberte's features remained compressed in a frown throughout luncheon, after which we retired to her room. Then suddenly, without hesitating and as though she had never at any point hesitated over her course of action: "Two o'clock!" she exclaimed. "You know the concert begins at half past." And she told her governess to make haste.

"But," I reminded her, "won't your father be cross with you?"

"Not the least little bit!"

"Surely, he was afraid it would look odd, because of the anniversary."

"What difference can it make to me what people think? I think it's perfectly absurd to worry about other people in matters of sentiment. We feel things for ourselves, not for the public. Mademoiselle has very few pleasures; she's been looking forward to going to this concert. I am not going to deprive her of it just to satisfy public opinion."

"But, Gilberte," I protested, taking her by the arm, "it is not to satisfy public opinion, it is to please your father."

"You are not going to pass remarks upon my conduct, I hope," she said sharply, plucking her arm away.

⁂

A favour still more precious than their taking me with them to the Jardin d'Acclimatation, the Swanns did not exclude me even from their friendship with Bergotte, which had been at the root of the attraction that I had found in them when, before I had even seen Gilberte, I reflected that her intimacy with that godlike elder would have made her, for me, the most passionately enthralling of friends, had not the disdain that I was bound to inspire in her forbidden me to hope that she would ever take me, in his company, to visit the towns that he loved. And lo, one day, came an invitation from Mme. Swann to a big luncheon-party. I did not know who else were to be the guests. On my arrival I was disconcerted, as I crossed the hall, by an alarming incident. Mme. Swann seldom missed an opportunity of adopting any of those customs which pass as fashionable for a season, and then, failing to find support, are speedily abandoned (as, for instance, many years before, she had had her 'private hansom,' or now had, printed in English upon a card inviting you to luncheon, the words, 'To meet,' followed by the name of some more or less important personage). Often enough these usages implied nothing mysterious and required no initiation. Take, for instance, a minute innovation of those days, imported from England; Odette had made her husband have some visiting cards printed on which the name Charles Swann was preceded by 'Mr.'. After the first visit that I paid her, Mme. Swann had left at my door one of these 'pasteboards,' as she called them. No one had ever left a card on me before; I felt at once so much pride, emotion, gratitude that, scraping together all the money I possessed, I ordered a superb basket of camellias and had it sent to Mme. Swann. I implored my father to go and leave a card on her, but first, quickly, to have some printed on which his name should bear the prefix 'Mr.'. He vouchsafed neither of my prayers; I was in despair for some days, and then asked myself whether he might not after all have been right. But this use of 'Mr.,' if it meant nothing, was at least intelligible. Not so with another that was revealed to me on the occasion of this luncheon-party, but revealed without any indication of its purport. At the moment when I was about to step from the hall into the drawing-room the butler handed me a thin, oblong envelope upon which my name was inscribed. In my surprise I thanked him; but I eyed the envelope with misgivings. I no more knew what I was expected to do with it than a foreigner knows what to do with one of those little utensils that they lay by his place at a Chinese banquet. I noticed that it was gummed down; I was afraid of appearing indiscreet, were I to open it then and there; and so I thrust it into my pocket with an air of knowing all about it. Mme. Swann had written to me a few days before, asking me to come to luncheon with 'just a few people.' There were, however, sixteen of us, among whom I never suspected for a moment that I was to find Bergotte. Mme. Swann, who had already 'named' me, as she called it, to several of her guests, suddenly, after my name, in the same tone that she had used in uttering it (in fact, as though we were merely two of the guests at her party, who ought each to feel equally flattered on meeting the other), pronounced that of the sweet Singer with the snowy locks. The name Bergotte made me jump like the sound of a revolver fired at me point blank, but instinctively, for appearance's sake, I bowed; there, straight in front of me, as by one of those conjurers whom we see standing whole and unharmed, in their frock coats, in the smoke of a pistol shot out of which a pigeon has just fluttered, my salute was returned by a young common little thick-set peering person, with a red nose curled like a snail-shell and a black tuft on his chin. I was cruelly disappointed, for what had just vanished in the dust of the explosion was not only the feeble old man, of whom no vestige now remained; there was also the beauty of an immense work which I had contrived to enshrine in the frail and hallowed organism that I had constructed, like a temple, expressly for itself, but for which no room was to be found in the squat figure, packed tight with blood-vessels, bones, muscles, sinews, of the little man with the snub nose and black beard who stood before me. All the Bergotte whom I had slowly and delicately elaborated for myself, drop by drop, like a stalactite, out of the transparent beauty of his books, ceased (I could see at once) to be of any use, the moment I was obliged to include in him the snail-shell nose and to utilise the little black beard; just as we must reject as worthless the solution of a problem the terms of which we have not read in full, having failed to observe that the total must amount to a specified figure. The nose and beard were elements similarly ineluctable, and all the more aggravating in that, while forcing me to reconstruct entirely the personage of Bergotte, they seemed further to imply, to produce, to secrete incessantly a certain quality of mind, alert and self-satisfied, which was not in the picture, for such a mind had no connexion whatever with the sort of intelligence that was diffused throughout those books, so intimately familiar to me, which were permeated by a gentle and godlike wisdom. Starting from them, I should never have arrived at that snail-shell nose; but starting from the nose, which did not appear to be in the slightest degree ashamed of itself, but stood out alone there like a grotesque ornament fastened on his face, I must proceed in a diametrically opposite direction from the work of Bergotte, I must arrive, it would seem, at the mentality of a busy and preoccupied engineer, of the sort who when you accost him in the street thinks it correct to say: "Thanks, and you?" before you have actually inquired of them how they are, or else, if you assure them that you have been charmed to make their acquaintance, respond with an abbreviation which they imagine to be effective, intelligent and up-to-date, inasmuch as it avoids any waste of precious time on vain formalities: "Same here!" .Names are, no doubt, but whimsical draughtsmen, giving us of people as well as of places sketches so little like the reality that we often experience a kind of stupor when we have before our eyes, in place of the imagined, the visible world (which, for that matter, is not the true world, our senses being little more endowed than our imagination with the art of portraiture, so little, indeed, that the final and approximately lifelike pictures which we manage to obtain of reality are at least as different from the visible world as that was from the imagined). But in Bergotte's case, my preconceived idea of him from his name troubled me far less than my familiarity with his work, to which I was obliged to attach, as to the cord of a balloon, the man with the little beard, without knowing whether it would still have the strength to raise him from the ground. It seemed quite clear, however, that it really was he who had written the books that I had so greatly enjoyed, for Mme. Swann having thought it incumbent upon her to tell him of my admiration for one of these, he shewed no surprise that she should have mentioned this to him rather than to any other of the party, nor did he seem to regard her action as due to a misapprehension, but, swelling out the frock coat which he had put on in honour of all these distinguished guests with a body distended in anticipation of the coming meal, while his mind was completely occupied by other, more real and more important considerations, it was only as at some finished episode in his early life, as though one had made an illusion to a costume of the Duc de Guise which he had worn, one season, at a fancy dress ball, that he smiled as he bore his mind back to the idea of his books; which at once began to fall in my estimation (dragging down with them the whole value of Beauty, of the world, of life itself), until they seemed to have been merely the casual amusement of a man with a little beard. I told myself that he must have taken great pains over them, but that, if he had lived upon an island surrounded by beds of pearl-oysters, he would instead have devoted himself to, and would have made a fortune out of, the pearling trade. His work no longer appeared to me so inevitable. And then I asked myself whether originality did indeed prove that great writers were gods, ruling each one over a kingdom that was his alone, or whether all that was not rather make-believe, whether the differences between one man's book and another's were not the result of their respective labours rather than the expression of a radical and essential difference between two contrasted personalities.

Meanwhile we had taken our places at the table. By the side of my plate I found a carnation, the stalk of which was wrapped in silver paper. It embarrassed me less than the envelope that had been handed to me in the hall, which, however, I had completely forgotten. This custom, strange as it was to me, became more intelligible when I saw all the male guests take up the similar carnations that were lying by their plates and slip them into the buttonholes of their coats. I did as they had done, with the air of spontaneity that a free-thinker assumes in church, who is not familiar with the order of service but rises when everyone else rises and kneels a moment after everyone else is on his knees. Another usage, equally strange to me but less ephemeral, disquieted me more. On the other side of my plate was a smaller plate, on which was heaped a blackish substance which I did not then know to be caviare. I was ignorant of what was to be done with it but firmly determined not to let it enter my mouth.

Bergotte was sitting not far from me and I could hear quite well everything that he said. I understood then the impression that M. de Norpois had formed of him. He had indeed a peculiar 'organ'; there is nothing that so much alters the material qualities of the voice as the presence of thought behind what one is saying; the resonance of one's diphthongs, the energy of one's labials are profoundly affected—in fact, one's whole way of speaking. His seemed to me to differ entirely from his way of writing, and even the things that he said from those with which he filled his books. But the voice issues from behind a mask through which it is not powerful enough to make us recognise, at first sight, a face which we have seen uncovered in the speaker's literary style. At certain points in the conversation, when Bergotte, by force of habit, began to talk in a way which no one but M. de Norpois would have thought affected or unpleasant, it was a long time before I discovered an exact correspondence with the parts of his books in which his form became so poetic and so musical. At those points I could see in what he was saying a plastic beauty independent of whatever his sentences might mean, and as human speech reflects the human soul, though without expressing it as does literary style, Bergotte appeared almost to be talking nonsense, intoning certain words and, if he were secretly pursuing, beneath them, a single image, stringing them together uninterruptedly on one continuous note, with a wearisome monotony. So that a pretentious, emphatic and monotonous opening was a sign of the rare aesthetic value of what he was saying, and an effect, in his conversation, of the same power which, in his books, produced that harmonious flow of imagery. I had had all the more difficulty in discovering this at first since what he said at such moments, precisely because it was the authentic utterance of Bergotte, had not the appearance of being Bergotte's. It was an abundant crop of clearly defined ideas, not included in that 'Bergotte manner' which so many story-tellers had appropriated to themselves; and this dissimilarity was probably but another aspect—made out with difficulty through the stream of conversation, as an eclipse is seen through a smoked glass—of the fact that when one read a page of Bergotte it was never just what would have been written by any of those lifeless imitators who, nevertheless, in newspapers and in books, adorned their prose with so many 'Bergottish' images and ideas. This difference in style arose from the fact that what was meant by 'Bergottism' was, first and foremost, a priceless element of truth hidden in the heart of everything, whence it was extracted by that great writer, by virtue of his genius, and that this extraction, and not simply the perpetration of 'Bergottisms,' was my sweet Singer's aim in writing. Though, it must be added, he continued to perpetrate them in spite of himself, and because he was Bergotte, so that, in one sense, every fresh beauty in his work was the little drop of Bergotte buried at the heart of a thing which he had distilled from it. But if, for that reason, each of those beauties was related to all the rest, and had a 'family likeness,' yet each remained separate and individual, as was the act of discovery that had brought it to the light of day; new, and consequently different from what was called the Bergotte manner, which was a loose synthesis of all the 'Bergottisms' already invented and set forth by him in writing, with no indication by which men who lacked genius might forecast what would be his next discovery. So it is with all great writers, the beauty of their language is as incalculable as that of a woman whom we have never seen; it is creative, because it is applied to an external object of which, and not of their language or its beauty, they are thinking, to which they have not yet given expression. An author of memorials of our time, wishing to write without too obviously seeming to be writing like Saint-Simon, might, on occasion, give us the first line of his portrait of Villars: "He was a rather tall man, dark . . . with an alert, open, expressive physiognomy," but what law of determinism could bring him to the discovery of Saint-Simon's next line, which begins with "and, to tell the truth, a trifle mad"? The true variety is in this abundance of real and unexpected elements, in the branch loaded with blue flowers which thrusts itself forward, against all reason, from the spring hedgerow that seemed already overcharged with blossoms, whereas the purely formal imitation of variety (and one might advance the same argument for all the other qualities of style) is but a barren uniformity, that is to say the very antithesis of variety, and cannot, in the work of imitators, give the illusion or recall other examples of variety save to a reader who has not acquired the sense of it from the masters themselves.

And so—just as Bergotte's way of speaking would no doubt have been charming if he himself had been merely an amateur repeating imitations of Bergotte, whereas it was attached to the mind of Bergotte, at work and in action, by essential ties which the ear did not at once distinguish—so it was because Bergotte applied that mind with precision to the reality which pleased him that his language had in it something positive, something over-rich, disappointing those who expected to hear him speak only of the 'eternal torrent of forms,' and of the 'mystic thrills of beauty.' Moreover the quality, always rare and new, of what he wrote was expressed in his conversation by so subtle a manner of approaching a question, ignoring every aspect of it that was already familiar, that he appeared to be seizing hold of an unimportant detail, to be quite wrong about it, to be speaking in paradox, so that his ideas seemed as often as not to be in confusion, for each of us finds lucidity only in those ideas which are in the same state of confusion as his own. Besides, as all novelty depends upon the elimination, first, of the stereotyped attitude to which we have grown accustomed, and which has seemed to us to be reality itself, every new conversation, as well as all original painting and music, must always appear laboured and tedious. It is founded upon figures of speech with which we are not familiar, the speaker appears to us to be talking entirely in metaphors; and this wearies us, and gives us the impression of a want of truth. (After all, the old forms of speech must in their time have been images difficult to follow when the listener was not yet cognisant of the universe which they depicted. But he has long since decided that this must be the real universe, and so relies confidently upon it.) So when Bergotte—and his figures appear simple enough to-day—said of Cottard that he was a mannikin in a bottle, always trying to rise to the surface, and of Brichot that "to him even more than to Mme. Swann the arrangement of his hair was a matter for anxious deliberation, because, in his twofold preoccupation over his profile and his reputation, he had always to make sure that it was so brushed as to give him the air at once of a lion and of a philosopher," one immediately felt the strain, and sought a foothold upon something which one called more concrete, meaning by that more ordinary. These unintelligible words, issuing from the mask that I had before my eyes, it was indeed to the writer whom I admired that they must be attributed, and yet they could not have been inserted among his books, in the form of a puzzle set in a series of different puzzles, they occupied another plane and required a transposition by means of which, one day, when I was repeating to myself certain phrases that I had heard Bergotte use, I discovered in them the whole machinery of his literary style, the different elements of which I was able to recognise and to name in this spoken discourse which had struck me as being so different.

From a less immediate point of view the special way, a little too meticulous, too intense, that he had of pronouncing certain words, certain adjectives which were constantly recurring in his conversation, and which he never uttered without a certain emphasis, giving to each of their syllables a separate force and intoning the last syllable (as for instance the word *visage,* which he always used in preference to *figure,* and enriched with a number of superfluous v's and s's and g's, which seemed all to explode from his outstretched palm at such moments) corresponded exactly to the fine passages in which, in his prose, he brought those favourite words into the light, preceded by a sort of margin and composed in such a way in the metrical whole of the phrase that the reader was obliged, if he were not to make a false quantity, to give to each of them its full value. And yet one did not find in the speech of Bergotte a certain luminosity which in his books, as in those of some other writers, often modified in the written phrase the appearance of its words. This was doubtless because that light issues from so profound a depth that its rays do not penetrate to our spoken words in the hours in which, thrown open to others by the act of conversation, we are to a certain extent closed against ourselves. In this respect, there were more intonations, there was more accent in his books than in his talk; an accent independent of the beauty of style, which the author himself has possibly not perceived, for it is not separable from his most intimate personality. It was this accent which, at the moments when, in his books, Bergotte was entirely natural, gave a rhythm to the words—often at such times quite insignificant—that he wrote. This accent is not marked on the printed page, there is nothing there to indicate it, and yet it comes of its own accord to his phrases, one cannot pronounce them in any other way, it is what was most ephemeral and at the same time most profound in the writer, and it is what will bear witness to his true nature, what will say whether, despite all the austerity that he has expressed he was gentle, despite all his sensuality sentimental.

Certain peculiarities of elocution, faint traces of which were to be found in Bergotte's conversation, were not exclusively his own; for when, later on, I came to know his brothers and sisters, I found those peculiarities much more accentuated in their speech. There was something abrupt and harsh in the closing words of a light and spirited utterance, something faint and dying at the end of a sad one. Swann, who had known the Master as a boy, told me that in those days one used to hear on his lips, just as much as on his brothers' and sisters', those inflexions, almost a family type, shouts of violent merriment interspersed with murmurings of a long-drawn melancholy, and that in the room in which they all played together he used to perform his part, better than any of them, in their symphonies, alternately deafening and subdued. However characteristic it may be, the sound that escapes from human lips is fugitive and does not survive the speaker. But it was not so with the pronunciation of the Bergotte family. For if it is difficult ever to understand, even in the *Meistersinger,* how an artist can invent music by listening to the twittering of birds, yet Bergotte had transposed and fixed in his written language that manner of dwelling on words which repeat themselves in shouts of joy, or fall, drop by drop, in melancholy sighs. There are in his books just such closing phrases where the accumulated sounds are prolonged (as in the last chords of the overture of an opera which cannot come to an end, and repeats several times over its supreme cadence before the conductor finally lays down his baton), in which, later on, I was to find a musical equivalent for those phonetic 'brasses' of the Bergotte family. But in his own case, from the moment in which he transferred them to his books, he ceased instinctively to make use of them in his speech. From the day on which he had begun to write—all the more markedly, therefore, in the later years in which I first knew him—his voice had lost this orchestration for ever.

These young Bergottes—the future writer and his brothers and sisters—were doubtless in no way superior, far from it, to other young people, more refined, more intellectual than themselves, who found the Bergottes rather 'loud,' that is to say a trifle vulgar, irritating one by the witticisms which characterised the tone, at once pretentious and puerile, of their household. But genius, and even what is only great talent, springs less from seeds of intellect and social refinement superior to those of other people than from the faculty of transposing, and so transforming them. To heat a liquid over an electric lamp one requires to have not the strongest lamp possible, but one of which the current can cease to illuminate, can be diverted so as instead of light to give heat. To mount the skies it is not necessary to have the most powerful of motors, one must have a motor which, instead of continuing to run along the earth's surface, intersecting with a vertical line the horizontal which it began by following, is capable of converting its speed into ascending force. Similarly the men who produce works of genius are not those who live in the most delicate atmosphere, whose conversation is most brilliant or their culture broadest, but those who have had the power, ceasing in a moment to live only for themselves, to make use of their personality as of a mirror, in such a way that their life, however unimportant it may be socially, and even, in a sense, intellectually speaking, is reflected by it, genius consisting in the reflective power of the writer and not in the intrinsic quality of the scene reflected. The day on which young Bergotte succeeded in shewing to the world of his readers the tasteless household in which he had passed his childhood, and the not very amusing conversations between himself and his brothers, on that day he climbed far above the friends of his family, more intellectual and more distinguished than himself; they in their fine Rolls Royces might return home expressing due contempt for the vulgarity of the Bergottes; but he, with his modest engine which had at last left the ground, he soared above their heads.

But there were other characteristics of his elocution which it was not with the members of his family, but with certain contemporary writers, that he must share. Younger men, who were beginning to repudiate him as a master and disclaimed any intellectual affinity to him in themselves, displayed their affinity without knowing it when they made use of the same adverbs, the same prepositions that he incessantly repeated, when they constructed their sentences in the same way, spoke in the same quiescent, lingering tone, by a reaction from the eloquent, easy language of an earlier generation. Perhaps these young men—we shall come across some of whom this may be said—had never known Bergotte. But his way of thinking, inoculated into them, had led them to those alterations of syntax and of accent which bear a necessary relation to originality of mind. A relation which, incidentally, requires to be traced. Thus Bergotte, if he owed nothing to any man for his manner of writing, derived his manner of speaking from one of his early associates, a marvellous talker to whose ascendancy he had succumbed, whom he imitated, unconsciously, in his conversation, but who himself, being less gifted, had never written any really outstanding book. So that if one had been in quest of originality in speech, Bergotte must have been labelled a disciple, a writer at second-hand, whereas, influenced by his friend only so far as talk went, he had been original and creative in his writings. Doubtless again, so as to distinguish himself from the previous generation, too fond as it had been of abstractions, of weighty commonplaces, when Bergotte wished to speak favourably of a book, what he would bring into prominence, what he would quote with approval would always be some scene that furnished the reader with an image, some picture that had no rational significance. "Ah, yes!" he would exclaim, "it is quite admirable! There is a little girl in an orange shawl. It is excellent!" or again, "Oh, yes, there is a passage in which there is a regiment marching along the street; yes, it is excellent!" As for style, he was not altogether of his time (though he remained quite exclusively of his race, abominating Tolstoy, George Eliot, Ibsen and Dostoievsky), for the word that always came to his lips when he wished to praise the style of any writer was 'mild.' "Yes, you know I like Chateaubriand better in *Atala* than in *René*; he seems to me to be 'milder.' " He said the word like a doctor who, when his patient assures him that milk will give him indigestion, answers, "But, you know, it's very 'mild'." And it is true that there was in Bergotte's style a kind of harmony similar to that for which the ancients used to praise certain of their orators in terms which we now find it hard to understand, accustomed as we are to our own modern tongues in which effects of that kind are not sought.

He would say also, with a shy smile, of pages of his own for which some one had expressed admiration: "I think it is more or less true, more or less accurate; it may be of some value perhaps," but he would say this simply from modesty, as a woman to whom one has said that her dress, or her daughter, is charming replies, "It is comfortable," or "She is a good girl." But the constructive instinct was too deeply implanted in Bergotte for him not to be aware that the sole proof that he had built usefully and on the lines of truth lay in the pleasure that his work had given, to himself first of all and afterwards to his readers. Only many years later, when he no longer had any talent, whenever he wrote anything with which he was not satisfied, so as not to have to suppress it, as he ought to have done, so as to be able to publish it with a clear conscience he would repeat, but to himself this time: "After all, it is more or less accurate, it must be of some value to the country." So that the phrase murmured long ago among his admirers by the insincere voice of modesty came in the end to be whispered in the secrecy of his heart by the uneasy tongue of pride. And the same words which had served Bergotte as an unwanted excuse for the excellence of his earliest works became as it were an ineffective consolation to him for the hopeless mediocrity of the latest.

A kind of austerity of taste which he had, a kind of determination to write nothing of which he could not say that it was 'mild,' which had made people for so many years regard him as a sterile and precious artist, a chiseller of exquisite trifles, was on the contrary the secret of his strength, for habit forms the style of the writer just as much as the character of the man, and the author who has more than once been patient to attain, in the expression of his thoughts, to a certain kind of attractiveness, in so doing lays down unalterably the boundaries of his talent, just as if he yields too often to pleasure, to laziness, to the fear of being put to trouble, he will find himself describing in terms which no amount of revision can modify, the forms of his own vices and the limits of his virtue.

If, however, despite all the analogies which I was to perceive later on between the writer and the man, I had not at first sight, in Mme. Swann's drawing-room, believed that this could be Bergotte, the author of so many divine books, who stood before me, perhaps I was not altogether wrong, for he himself did not, in the strict sense of the word, 'believe' it either. He did not believe it because he shewed a great assiduity in the presence of fashionable people (and yet he was not a snob), of literary men and journalists who were vastly inferior to himself. Of course he had long since learned, from the suffrage of his readers, that he had genius, compared to which social position and official rank were as nothing. He had learned that he had genius, but he did not believe it because he continued to simulate deference towards mediocre writers in order to succeed, shortly, in becoming an Academician, whereas the Academy and the Faubourg Saint-Germain have no more to do with that part of the Eternal Mind which is the author of the works of Bergotte than with the law of causality or the idea of God. That also he knew, but as a kleptomaniac knows, without profiting by the knowledge, that it is wrong to steal. And the man with the little beard and snail-shell nose knew and used all the tricks of the gentleman who pockets your spoons, in his efforts to reach the coveted academic chair, or some duchess or other who could dispose of several votes at the election, but while on his way to them he would endeavour to make sure that no one who would consider the pursuit of such an object a vice in him should see what he was doing. He was only half-successful; one could hear, alternating with the speech of the true Bergotte, that of the other Bergotte, ambitious, utterly selfish, who thought it not worth his while to speak of any but his powerful, rich or noble friends, so as to enhance his own position, he who in his books, when he was really himself, had so well portrayed the charm, pure as a mountain spring, of poverty.

As for those other vices to which M. de Norpois had alluded, that almost incestuous love, which was made still worse, people said, by a want of delicacy in the matter of money, if they contradicted, in a shocking manner, the tendency of his latest novels, in which he shewed everywhere a regard for what was right and proper so painfully rigid that the most innocent pleasures of their heroes were poisoned by it, and that even the reader found himself turning their pages with a sense of acute discomfort, and asked himself whether it was possible to go on living even the quietest of lives, those vices did not at all prove, supposing that they were fairly imputed to Bergotte, that his literature was a lie and all his sensitiveness mere play-acting. Just as in pathology certain conditions similar in appearance are due, some to an excess, others to an insufficiency of tension, of secretion and so forth, so there may be vice arising from supersensitiveness just as much as from the lack of it. Perhaps it is only in really vicious lives that the moral problem can arise in all its disquieting strength. And of this problem the artist finds a solution in the terms not of his own personal life but of what is for him the true life, a general, a literary solution. As the great Doctors of the Church began often, without losing their virtue, by acquainting themselves with the sins of all mankind, out of which they extracted their own personal sanctity, so great artists often, while being thoroughly wicked, make use of their vices in order to arrive at a conception of the moral law that is binding upon us all. It is the vices (or merely the weaknesses and follies) of the circle in which they live, the meaningless conversation, the frivolous or shocking lives of their daughters, the infidelity of their wives, or their own misdeeds that writers have most often castigated in their books, without, however, thinking it necessary to alter their domestic economy or to improve the tone of their households. And this contrast had never before been so striking as it was in Bergotte's time, because, on the one hand, in proportion as society grew more corrupt, our notions of morality were increasingly exalted, while on the other hand the public were now told far more than they had ever hitherto known about the private lives of literary men; and on certain evenings in the theatre people would point out the author whom I had so greatly admired at Combray, sitting at the back of a box the mere composition of which seemed an oddly humorous, or perhaps keenly ironical commentary upon—a brazen-faced denial of—the thesis which he had just been maintaining in his latest book. Not that anything which this or that casual informant could tell me was of much use in helping me to settle the question of the goodness or wickedness of Bergotte. An intimate friend would furnish proofs of his hardheartedness; then a stranger would cite some instance (touching, since he had evidently wished it to remain hidden) of his real depth of feeling. He had behaved cruelly to his wife. But in a village inn, where he had gone to spend the night, he had stayed on to watch over a poor woman who had tried to drown herself, and when he was obliged to continue his journey had left a large sum of money with the landlord, so that he should not turn the poor creature out, but see that she got proper attention. Perhaps the more the great writer was developed in Bergotte at the expense of the little man with the beard, so much the more his own personal life was drowned in the flood of all the lives that he imagined, until he no longer felt himself obliged to perform certain practical duties, for which he had substituted the duty of imagining those other lives. But at the same time, because he imagined the feelings of others as completely as if they had been his own, whenever he was obliged, for any reason, to talk to some person who had been unfortunate (that is to say in a casual encounter) he would, in doing so, take up not his own personal standpoint but that of the sufferer himself, a standpoint in which he would have been horrified by the speech of those who continued to think of their own petty concerns in the presence of another's grief. With the result that he gave rise everywhere to justifiable rancour and to undying gratitude.

Above all, he was a man who in his heart of hearts loved nothing really except certain images and (like a miniature set in the floor of a casket) the composing and painting of them in words. For a trifle that some one had sent him, if that trifle gave him the opportunity of introducing one or two of these images, he would be prodigal in the expression of his gratitude, while shewing none whatever for an expensive present. And if he had had to plead before a tribunal, he would inevitably have chosen his words not for the effect that they might have on the judge but with an eye to certain images which the judge would certainly never have perceived.

That first day on which I met him with Gilberte's parents, I mentioned to Bergotte that I had recently been to hear Berma in *Phèdre*; and he told me that in the scene in which she stood with her arm raised to the level of her shoulder—one of those very scenes that had been greeted with such applause—she had managed to suggest with great nobility of art certain classical figures which, quite possibly, she had never even seen, a Hesperid carved in the same attitude upon a metope at Olympia, and also the beautiful primitive virgins on the Erechtheum.

"It may be sheer divination, and yet I fancy that she visits the museums. It would be interesting to 'establish' that." ('Establish' was one of those regular Bergotte expressions, and one which various young men who had never met him had caught from him, speaking like him by some sort of telepathic suggestion.)

"Do you mean the Cariatides?" asked Swann.

"No, no," said Bergotte, "except in the scene where she confesses her passion to Œnone, where she moves her hand exactly like Hegeso on the stele in the Ceramic, it is a far more primitive art that she revives. I was referring to the Korai of the old Erechtheum, and I admit that there is perhaps nothing quite so remote from the art of Racine, but there are so many things already in *Phèdre,* . . . that one more . . . Oh, and then, yes, she is really charming, that little sixth century Phaedra, the rigidity of the arm, the lock of hair 'frozen into marble,' yes, you know, it is wonderful of her to have discovered all that. There is a great deal more antiquity in it than in most of the books they are labelling 'antique' this year."

As Bergotte had in one of his volumes addressed a famous invocation to these archaic statues, the words that he was now uttering were quite intelligible to me and gave me a fresh reason for taking an interest in Berma's acting. I tried to picture her again in my mind, as she had looked in that scene in which I remembered that she had raised her arm to the level of her shoulder. And I said to myself, "There we have the Hesperid of Olympia; there we have the sister of those adorable suppliants on the Acropolis; there is indeed nobility in art!" But if these considerations were to enhance for me the beauty of Berma's gesture, Bergotte should have put them into my head before the performance. Then, while that attitude of the actress was actually existing in flesh and blood before my eyes, at that moment in which the thing that was happening had still the substance of reality, I might have tried to extract from it the idea of archaic sculpture. But of Berma in that scene all that I retained was a memory which was no longer liable to modification, slender as a picture which lacks that abundant perspective of the present tense where one is free to delve and can always discover something new, a picture to which one cannot retrospectively give a meaning that is not subject to verification and correction from without. At this point Mme. Swann joined in the conversation, asking me whether Gilberte had remembered to give me what Bergotte had written about *Phèdre,* and adding, "My daughter is such a scatter-brain!" Bergotte smiled modestly and protested that they were only a few pages, of no importance. "But it is perfectly charming, that little pamphlet, that little 'tract' of yours!" Mme. Swann assured him, to shew that she was a good hostess, to make the rest of us think that she had read Bergotte's essay, and also because she liked not merely to flatter Bergotte, but to make a selection for herself out of what he wrote, to control his writing. And it must be admitted that she did inspire him, though not in the way that she supposed. But when all is said there is, between what constituted the smartness of Mme. Swann's drawing-room and a whole side of Bergotte's work, so close a correspondence that either of them might serve, among elderly men to-day, as a commentary upon the other.

I let myself go in telling him what my impressions had been. Often Bergotte disagreed, but he allowed me to go on talking. I told him that I had liked the green light which was turned on when Phaedra raised her arm. "Ah! The designer will be glad to hear that; he is a real artist. I shall tell him you liked it, because he is very proud of that effect. I must say, myself, that I do not care for it very much, it drowns everything in a sort of aqueous vapour, little Phaedra standing there looks too like a branch of coral on the floor of an aquarium. You will tell me, of course, that it brings out the cosmic aspect of the play. That is quite true. All the same, it would be more appropriate if the scene were laid in the Court of Neptune. Oh yes, of course, I know the Vengeance of Neptune does come into the play. I don't suggest for a moment that we should think only of Port-Royal, but after all the story that Racine tells us is not the 'Loves of the Sea-Urchins.' Still, it is what my friend wished to have, and it is very well done, right or wrong, and it's really quite pretty when you come to look at it. Yes, so you liked that, did you; you understood what it meant, of course; we feel the same about it, don't we, really; it is a trifle unbalanced, what he's done, you agree with me, but on the whole it is very clever of him." And so, when Bergotte had to express an opinion which was the opposite of my own, he in no way reduced me to silence, to the impossibility of framing any reply, as M. de Norpois would have done. This does not prove that Bergotte's opinions were of less value than the Ambassador's; far from it. A powerful idea communicates some of its strength to him who challenges it. Being itself a part of the riches of the universal Mind, it makes its way into, grafts itself upon the mind of him whom it is employed to refute, slips in among the ideas already there, with the help of which, gaining a little ground, he completes and corrects it; so that the final utterance is always to some extent the work of both parties to a discussion. It is to ideas which are not, properly speaking, ideas at all, to ideas which, founded upon nothing, can find no support, no kindred spirit among the ideas of the adversary, that he, grappling with something which is not there, can find no word to say in answer. The arguments of M. de Norpois (in the matter of art) were unanswerable simply because they were without reality.

Since Bergotte did not sweep aside my objections, I confessed to him that they had won the scorn of M. de Norpois. "But he's an old parrot!" was the answer. "He keeps on pecking you because he imagines all the time that you're a piece of cake, or a slice of cuttle-fish." "What's that?" asked Swann. "Are you a friend of Norpois?" "He's as dull as a wet Sunday," interrupted his wife, who had great faith in Bergotte's judgment, and was no doubt afraid that M. de Norpois might have spoken ill of her to us. "I tried to make him talk after dinner; I don't know if it's his age or his indigestion, but I found him too sticky for words. I really thought I should have to 'dope' him." "Yes, isn't he?" Bergotte chimed in. "You see, he has to keep his mouth shut half the time so as not to use up all the stock of inanities that hold his shirt-front down and his white waistcoat up." "I think that Bergotte and my wife are both very hard on him," came from Swann, who took the 'line,' in his own house, of a plain, sensible man. "I quite see that Norpois cannot interest you very much, but from another point of view," (for Swann made a hobby of collecting scraps of 'real life') "he is quite remarkable, quite a remarkable instance of a lover. When he was Secretary at Rome," he went on, after making sure that Gilberte could not hear him, "he had, here in Paris, a mistress with whom he was madly in love, and he found time to make the double journey every week, so as to see her for a couple of hours. She was, as it happens, a most intelligent woman, and is quite attractive to this day; she is a dowager now. And he has had any number of others since then. I'm sure I should have gone stark mad if the woman I was in love with lived in Paris and I was kept shut up in Rome. Nervous men ought always to love, as the lower orders say, 'beneath' them, so that their women have a material inducement to do what they tell them." As he spoke, Swann realised that I might be applying this maxim to himself and Odette, and as, even among superior beings, at the moment when you and they seem to be soaring together above the plane of life, their personal pride is still basely human, he was seized by a violent ill-will towards me. But this was made manifest only in the uneasiness of his glance. He said nothing more to me at the time. Not that this need surprise us. When Racine (according to a story the truth of which has been exploded, though the theme of it may be found recurring every day in Parisian life) made an illusion to Scarron in front of Louis XIV, the most powerful monarch on earth said nothing to the poet that evening. It was on the following day, only, that he fell.

But as a theory requires to be stated as a whole, Swann, after this momentary irritation, and after wiping his eyeglass, finished saying what was in his mind in these words, words which were to assume later on in my memory the importance of a prophetic warning, which I had not had the sense to take: "The danger of that kind of love, however, is that the woman's subjection calms the man's jealousy for a time but also makes it more exacting. After a little he will force his mistress to live like one of those prisoners whose cells they keep lighted day and night, to prevent their escaping. And that generally ends in trouble."

I reverted to M. de Norpois. "You must never trust him; he has the most wicked tongue!" said Mme. Swann in an accent which seemed to me to indicate that M. de Norpois had been 'saying things' about her, especially as Swann looked across at his wife with an air of rebuke, as though to stop her before she went too far.

Meanwhile Gilberte, who had been told to go and get ready for our drive, stayed to listen to the conversation, and hovered between her mother and her father, leaning affectionately against his shoulder. Nothing, at first sight, could be in greater contrast to Mme. Swann, who was dark, than this child with her red hair and golden skin. But after looking at them both for a moment one saw in Gilberte many of the features—for instance, the nose cut short with a sharp, unfaltering decision by the unseen sculptor whose chisel repeats its work upon successive generations—the expression, the movements of her mother; to take an illustration from another form of art, she made one think of a portrait that was not a good likeness of Mme. Swann, whom the painter, to carry out some whim of colouring, had posed in a partial disguise, dressed to go out to a party in Venetian 'character.' And as not merely was she wearing a fair wig, but every atom of a swarthier complexion had been discharged from her flesh which, stripped of its veil of brownness, seemed more naked, covered simply in rays of light shed by an internal sun, this 'make-up' was not just superficial but was incarnate in her; Gilberte had the appearance of embodying some fabulous animal or of having assumed a mythological disguise. This reddish skin was so exactly that of her father that nature seemed to have had, when Gilberte was being created, to solve the problem of how to reconstruct Mme. Swann piecemeal, without any material at her disposal save the skin of M. Swann. And nature had utilised this to perfection, like a master carver who makes a point of leaving the grain, the knots of his wood in evidence. On Gilberte's face, at the corner of a perfect reproduction of Odette's nose, the skin was raised so as to preserve intact the two beauty spots of M. Swann. It was a new variety of Mme. Swann that was thus obtained, growing there by her side like a white lilac-tree beside a purple. At the same time it did not do to imagine the boundary line between these two likenesses as definitely fixed. Now and then, when Gilberte smiled, one could distinguish the oval of her father's cheek upon her mother's face, as though some one had mixed them together to see what would result from the blend; this oval grew distinct, as an embryo grows into a living shape, it lengthened obliquely, expanded, and a moment later had disappeared. In Gilberte's eyes there was the frank and honest gaze of her father; this was how she had looked at me when she gave me the agate marble and said, "Keep it, to remind yourself of our friendship." But were one to put a question to Gilberte, to ask her what she had been doing, then one saw in those same eyes the embarrassment, the uncertainty, the prevarication, the misery that Odette used in the old days to shew, when Swann asked her where she had been and she gave him one of those lying answers which, in those days, drove the lover to despair and now made him abruptly change the conversation, as an incurious and prudent husband. Often in the Champs-Elysées I was disturbed by seeing this look on Gilberte's face. But as a rule my fears were unfounded. For in her, a purely physical survival of her mother, this look (if nothing else) had ceased to have any meaning. It was when she had been to her classes, when she must go home for some lesson, that Gilberte's pupils executed that movement which, in time past, in the eyes of Odette, had been caused by the fear of disclosing that she had, during the day, opened the door to one of her lovers, or was at that moment in a hurry to be at some trysting-place. So one could see the two natures of M. and Mme. Swann ebb and flow, encroaching alternately one upon the other in the body of this Mélusine.

It is, of course, common knowledge that a child takes after both its father and its mother. And yet the distribution of the merits and defects which it inherits is so oddly planned that, of two good qualities which seemed inseparable in one of the parents you will find but one in the child, and allied to that very fault in the other parent which seemed most irreconcilable with it. Indeed, the incarnation of a good moral quality in an incompatible physical blemish is often one of the laws of filial resemblance. Of two sisters, one will combine with the proud bearing of her father the mean little soul of her mother; the other, abundantly endowed with the paternal intelligence, will present it to the world in the aspect which her mother has made familiar; her mother's shapeless nose and scraggy bosom are become the bodily covering of talents which you had learned to distinguish beneath a superb presence. With the result that of each of the sisters one can say with equal justification that it is she who takes more after one or other of her parents. It is true that Gilberte was an only child, but there were, at the least, two Gilbertes. The two natures, her father's and her mother's, did more than just blend themselves in her; they disputed the possession of her—and yet one cannot exactly say that, which would let it be thought that a third Gilberte was in the meantime suffering by being the prey of the two others. Whereas Gilberte was alternately one and the other, and at any given moment no more than one of the two, that is to say incapable, when she was not being good, of suffering accordingly, the better Gilberte not being able at the time, on account of her momentary absence, to detect the other's lapse from virtue. And so the less good of the two was free to enjoy pleasures of an ignoble kind. When the other spoke to you from the heart of her father, she held broad views, you would have liked to engage with her upon a fine and beneficent enterprise; you told her so, but, just as your arrangements were being completed, her mother's heart would already have resumed its control; hers was the voice that answered; and you were disappointed and vexed—almost baffled, as in the face of a substitution of one person for another—by an unworthy thought, an insincere laugh, in which Gilberte saw no harm, for they sprang from what she herself at that moment was. Indeed, the disparity was at times so great between these two Gilbertes that you asked yourself, though without finding an answer, what on earth you could have said or done to her, last time, to find her now so different. When she herself had arranged to meet you somewhere, not only did she fail to appear, and offer no excuse afterwards, but, whatever the influence might have been that had made her change her mind, she shewed herself in so different a character when you did meet her that you might well have supposed that, taken in by a likeness such as forms the plot of the *Menaechmi*, you were now talking to some one not the person who had so politely expressed her desire to see you, had she not shewn signs of an ill-humour which revealed that she felt herself to be in the wrong, and wished to avoid the necessity of an explanation.

"Now then, run along and get ready; you're keeping us waiting," her mother reminded her.

"I'm so happy here with my little Papa; I want to stay just for a minute," replied Gilberte, burying her head beneath the arm of her father, who passed his fingers lovingly through her bright hair.

Swann was one of those men who, having lived for a long time amid the illusions of love, have seen the prosperity that they themselves brought to numberless women increase the happiness of those women without exciting in them any gratitude, any tenderness towards their benefactors; but in their child they believe that they can feel an affection which, being incarnate in their own name, will enable them to remain in the world after their death. When there should no longer be any Charles Swann, there would still be a Mlle. Swann, or a Mme. something-else, *née* Swann, who would continue to love the vanished father. Indeed, to love him too well, perhaps, Swann may have been thinking, for he acknowledged Gilberte's caress with a "Good girl!" in that tone, made tender by our apprehension, to which, when we think of the future, we are prompted by the too passionate affection of a creature who is destined to survive us. To conceal his emotion, he joined in our talk about Berma. He pointed out to me, but in a detached, a listless tone, as though he wished to remain to some extent unconcerned in what he was saying, with what intelligence, with what an astonishing fitness the actress said to Œnone, "You knew it!" He was right. That intonation at least had a value that was really intelligible, and might therefore have satisfied my desire to find incontestable reasons for admiring Berma. But it was by the very fact of its clarity that it did not at all content me. Her intonation was so ingenious, so definite in intention and in its meaning, that it seemed to exist by itself, so that any intelligent actress might have learned to use it. It was a fine idea; but whoever else should conceive it as fully must possess it equally. It remained to Berma's credit that she had discovered it, but is one entitled to use the word 'discover' when the object in question is something that would not be different if one had been given it, something that does not belong essentially to one's own nature seeing that some one else may afterwards reproduce it?

"Upon my soul, your presence among us does raise the tone of the conversation!" Swann observed to me, as though to excuse himself to Bergotte; for he had formed the habit, in the Guermantes set, of entertaining great artists as if they were just ordinary friends whom one seeks only to make eat the dishes that they like, play the games, or, in the country, indulge in whatever form of sport they please. "It seems to me that we're talking a great deal of art," he went on. "But it's so nice, I do love it!" said Mme. Swann, throwing me a look of gratitude, as well from good nature as because she had not abandoned her old aspirations towards a more intellectual form of conversation. After this it was to others of the party, and principally to Gilberte, that Bergotte addressed himself. I had told him everything that I felt with a freedom which had astonished me, and was due to the fact that, having acquired with him, years before (in the course of all those hours of solitary reading, in which he was to me merely the better part of myself), the habit of sincerity, of frankness, of confidence, I was less frightened by him than by a person with whom I should have been talking for the first time. And yet, for the same reason, I was greatly disturbed by the thought of the impression that I must have been making on him, the contempt that I had supposed he would feel for my ideas dating not from that afternoon but from the already distant time in which I had begun to read his books in our garden at Combray. And yet I ought perhaps to have reminded myself that, since it was in all sincerity, abandoning myself to the train of my thoughts, that I had felt, on the one hand, so intensely in sympathy with the work of Bergotte and on the other hand, in the theatre, a disappointment the reason of which I did not know, those two instinctive movements which had both carried me away could not be so very different from one another, but must be obedient to the same laws; and that that mind of Bergotte which I had loved in his books could not be anything entirely foreign and hostile to my disappointment and to my inability to express it. For my intelligence must be a uniform thing, perhaps indeed there exists but a single intelligence, in which everyone in the world participates, towards which each of us from the position of his own separate body turns his eyes, as in a theatre where, if everyone has his own separate seat, there is on the other hand but a single stage. Of course, the ideas which I was tempted to seek to disentangle were probably not those whose depths Bergotte usually sounded in his books. But if it were one and the same intelligence which we had, he and I, at our disposal, he must, when he heard me express those ideas, be reminded of them, cherish them, smile upon them, keeping probably, in spite of what I supposed, before his mind's eye a whole world of intelligence other than that an excerpt of which had passed into his books, an excerpt upon which I had based my imagination of his whole mental universe. Just as priests, having the widest experience of the human heart, are best able to pardon the sins which they do not themselves commit, so genius, having the widest experience of the human intelligence, can best understand the ideas most directly in opposition to those which form the foundation of its own writings. I ought to have told myself all this (though, for that matter, it was none too consoling a thought, for the benevolent condescension of great minds has as a corollary the incomprehension and hostility of small; and one derives far less happiness from the friendliness of a great writer, which one finds expressed, failing a more intimate association, in his books, than suffering from the hostility of a woman whom one did not choose for her intelligence but cannot help loving). I ought to have told myself all this, but I did not; I was convinced that I had appeared a fool to Bergotte, when Gilberte whispered in my ear:

"You can't think how delighted I am, because you have made a conquest of my great friend Bergotte. He's been telling Mamma that he found you extremely intelligent."

"Where are we going?" I asked her. "Oh, wherever you like; you know, it's all the same to me." But since the incident that had occurred on the anniversary of her grandfather's death I had begun to ask myself whether Gilberte's character was not other than I had supposed, whether that indifference to what was to be done, that wisdom, that calm, that gentle and constant submission did not indeed conceal passionate longings which her self-esteem would not allow to be visible and which she disclosed only by her sudden resistance whenever by any chance they were frustrated.

As Bergotte lived in the same neighbourhood as my parents, we left the house together; in the carriage he spoke to me of my health. "Our friends were telling me that you had been ill. I am very sorry. And yet, after all, I am not too sorry, because I can see quite well that you are able to enjoy the pleasures of the mind, and they are probably what mean most to you, as to everyone who has known them."

Alas, what he was saying, how little, I felt, did it apply to myself, whom all reasoning, however exalted it might be, left cold, who was happy only in moments of pure idleness, when I was comfortable and well; I felt how purely material was everything that I desired in life, and how easily I could dispense with the intellect. As I made no distinction among my pleasures between those that came to me from different sources, of varying depth and permanence, I was thinking, when the moment came to answer him, that I should have liked an existence in which I was on intimate terms with the Duchesse de Guermantes, and often came across, as in the old toll-house in the Champs-Elysées, a chilly smell that would remind me of Combray. But in this ideal existence which I dared not confide to him the pleasures of the mind found no place.

"No, sir, the pleasures of the mind count for very little with me; it is not them that I seek after; indeed I don't even know that I have ever tasted them."

"You really think not?" he replied. "Well, it may be, no, wait a minute now, yes, after all that must be what you like best, I can see it now clearly, I am certain of it."

As certainly, he did not succeed in convincing me; and yet I was already feeling happier, less restricted. After what M. de Norpois had said to me, I had regarded my moments of dreaming, of enthusiasm, of self-confidence as purely subjective and barren of truth. But according to Bergotte, who appeared to understand my case, it seemed that it was quite the contrary, that the symptom I ought to disregard was, in fact, my doubts, my disgust with myself. Moreover, what he had said about M. de Norpois took most of the sting out of a sentence from which I had supposed that no appeal was possible.

"Are you being properly looked after?" Bergotte asked me. "Who is treating you?" I told him that I had seen, and should probably go on seeing, Cottard. "But that's not at all the sort of man you want!" he told me. "I know nothing about him as a doctor. But I've met him at Mme. Swann's. The man's an imbecile. Even supposing that that doesn't prevent his being a good doctor, which I hesitate to believe, it does prevent his being a good doctor for artists, for men of intelligence. People like you must have suitable doctors, I would almost go so far as to say treatment and medicines specially adapted to themselves. Cottard will bore you, and that alone will prevent his treatment from having any effect. Besides, the proper course of treatment cannot possibly be the same for you as for any Tom, Dick or Harry. Nine tenths of the ills from which intelligent people suffer spring from their intellect. They need at least a doctor who understands their disease. How do you expect that Cottard should be able to treat you; he has made allowances for the difficulty of digesting sauces, for gastric trouble, but he has made no allowance for the effect of reading Shakespeare. So that his calculations are inaccurate in your case, the balance is upset; you see, always the little bottle-imp bobbing up again. He will find that you have a dilated stomach; he has no need to examine you for it, since he has it already in his eye. You can see it there, reflected in his glasses." This manner of speaking tired me greatly; I said to myself, with the stupidity of common sense: "There is no more any dilated stomach reflected in Professor Cottard's glasses than there are inanities stored behind the white waistcoat of M. de Norpois." "I should recommend you, instead," went on Bergotte, "to consult Dr. du Boulbon, who is quite an intelligent man." "He is a great admirer of your books," I replied. I saw that Bergotte knew this, and I decided that kindred spirits soon come together, that one has few really 'unknown friends.' What Bergotte had said to me with respect to Cottard impressed me, while running contrary to everything that I myself believed. I was in no way disturbed by finding my doctor a bore; I expected of him that, thanks to an art the laws of which were beyond me, he should pronounce on the subject of my health an infallible oracle, after consultation of my entrails. And I did not at all require that, with the aid of an intellect, in which I easily outstripped him, he should seek to understand my intellect, which I pictured to myself merely as a means, of no importance in itself, of trying to attain to certain external verities. I doubted greatly whether intellectual people required a different form of hygiene from imbeciles, and I was quite prepared to submit myself to the latter kind. "I'll tell you who does need a good doctor, and that is our friend Swann," said Bergotte. And on my asking whether he was ill, "Well, don't you see, he's typical of the man who has married a whore, and has to swallow a hundred serpents every day, from women who refuse to meet his wife, or men who were there before him. You can see them in his mouth, writhing. Just look, any day you're there, at the way he lifts his eyebrows when he comes in, to see who's in the room." The malice with which Bergotte spoke thus to a stranger of the friends in whose house he had so long been received as a welcome guest was as new to me as the almost amorous tone which, in that house, he had constantly been adopting to speak to them. Certainly a person like my great-aunt, for instance, would have been incapable of treating any of us with that politeness which I had heard Bergotte lavishing upon Swann. Even to the people whom she liked, she enjoyed saying disagreeable things. But behind their backs she would never have uttered a word to which they might not have listened. There was nothing less like the social 'world' than our society at Combray. The Swanns' house marked a stage on the way towards it, towards its inconstant tide. If they had not yet reached the open sea, they were certainly in the lagoon. "This is all between ourselves," said Bergotte as he left me outside my own door. A few years later I should have answered: "I never repeat things." That is the ritual phrase of society, from which the slanderer always derives a false reassurance. It is what I should have said then and there to Bergotte, for one does not invent all one's speeches, especially when one is acting merely as a card in the social pack. But I did not yet know the formula. What my great-aunt, on the other hand, would have said on a similar occasion was: "If you don't wish it to be repeated, why do you say it?" That is the answer of the unsociable, of the quarrelsome. I was nothing of that sort: I bowed my head in silence.

Men of letters who were in my eyes persons of considerable importance had had to plot for years before they succeeded in forming with Bergotte relations which continued to the end to be but dimly literary, and never emerged beyond the four walls of his study, whereas I, I had now been installed among the friends of the great writer, at the first attempt and without any effort, like a man who, instead of standing outside in a crowd for hours in order to secure a bad seat in a theatre, is shewn in at once to the best, having entered by a door that is closed to the public. If Swann had thus opened such a door to me, it was doubtless because, just as a king finds himself naturally inviting his children's friends into the royal box, or on board the royal yacht, so Gilberte's parents received their daughter's friends among all the precious things that they had in their house, and the even more precious intimacies that were enshrined there. But at that time I thought, and perhaps was right in thinking, that this friendliness on Swann's part was aimed indirectly at my parents. I seemed to remember having heard once at Combray that he had suggested to them that, in view of my admiration for Bergotte, he should take me to dine with him, and that my parents had declined, saying that I was too young, and too easily excited to 'go out' yet. My parents, no doubt, represented to certain other people (precisely those who seemed to me the most marvellous) something quite different from what they were to me, so that, just as when the lady in pink had paid my father a tribute of which he had shewn himself so unworthy, I should have wished them to understand what an inestimable present I had just received, and to testify their gratitude to that generous and courteous Swann who had offered it to me, or to them rather, without seeming any more to be conscious of its value than is, in Luini's fresco, the charming Mage with the arched nose and fair hair, to whom, it appeared, Swann had at one time been thought to bear a striking resemblance.

Unfortunately, this favour that Swann had done me, which, as I entered the house, before I had even taken off my greatcoat, I reported to my parents, in the hope that it would awaken in their hearts an emotion equal to my own, and would determine them upon some immense and decisive act of politeness towards the Swanns, did not appear to be greatly appreciated by them. "Swann introduced you to Bergotte? An excellent friend for you, charming society!" cried my father, ironically. "It only wanted that!" Alas, when I had gone on to say that Bergotte was by no means inclined to admire M. de Norpois:

"I dare say!" retorted my father. "That simply proves that he's a foolish and evil-minded fellow. My poor boy, you never had much common sense, still, I'm sorry to see you fall among a set that will finish you off altogether."

Already the mere fact of my frequenting the Swanns had been far from delighting my parents. This introduction to Bergotte seemed to them a fatal but natural consequence of an original mistake, namely their own weakness in controlling me, which my grandfather would have called a 'want of circumspection.' I felt that I had only, in order to complete their ill humour, to tell them that this perverse fellow who did not appreciate M. de Norpois had found me extremely intelligent. For I had observed that whenever my father decided that anyone, one of my school friends for instance, was going astray—as I was at that moment—if that person had the approval of somebody whom my father did not rate high, he would see in this testimony the confirmation of his own stern judgment. The evil merely seemed to him more pronounced. I could hear him already exclaiming, "Of course, it all hangs together," an expression that terrified me by the vagueness and vastness of the reforms the introduction of which into my quiet life it seemed to threaten. But since, were I not to tell them what Bergotte had said of me, even then nothing could efface the impression my parents had formed, that this should be made slightly worse mattered little. Besides, they seemed to me so unfair, so completely mistaken, that not only had I not any hope, I had scarcely any desire to bring them to a more equitable point of view. At the same time, feeling, as the words came from my lips, how alarmed they would be by the thought that I had found favour in the sight of a person who dismissed clever men as fools and had earned the contempt of all decent people, praise from whom, since it seemed to me a thing to be desired, would only encourage me in wrongdoing, it was in faltering tones and with a slightly shamefaced air that, coming to the end of my story, I flung them the bouquet of: "He told the Swanns that he had found me extremely intelligent." Just as a poisoned dog, in a field, rushes, without knowing why, straight to the grass which is the precise antidote to the toxin that he has swallowed, so I, without in the least suspecting it, had said the one thing in the world that was capable of overcoming in my parents this prejudice with respect to Bergotte, a prejudice which all the best reasons that I could have urged, all the tributes that I could have paid him, must have proved powerless to defeat. Instantly the situation changed.

"Oh! He said that he found you intelligent," repeated my mother. "I am glad to hear that, because he is a man of talent."

"What! He said that, did he?" my father joined in. "I don't for a moment deny his literary distinction, before which the whole world bows; only it is a pity that he should lead that scarcely reputable existence to which old Norpois made a guarded allusion, when he was here," he went on, not seeing that against the sovran virtue of the magic words which I had just repeated the depravity of Bergotte's morals was little more able to contend than the falsity of his judgment.

"But, my dear," Mamma interrupted, "we've no proof that it's true. People say all sorts of things. Besides M. de Norpois may have the most perfect manners in the world, but he's not always very good-natured, especially about people who are not exactly his sort."

"That's quite true; I've noticed it myself," my father admitted.

"And then, too, a great deal ought to be forgiven Bergotte, since he thinks well of my little son," Mamma went on, stroking my hair with her fingers and fastening upon me a long and pensive gaze.

My mother had not, indeed, awaited this verdict from Bergotte before telling me that I might ask Gilberte to tea whenever I had friends coming. But I dared not do so for two reasons. The first was that at Gilberte's there was never anything else to drink but tea. Whereas at home Mamma insisted on there being a pot of chocolate as well. I was afraid that Gilberte might regard this as 'common'; and so conceive a great contempt for us. The other reason was a formal difficulty, a question of procedure which I could never succeed in settling. When I arrived at Mme. Swann's she used to ask me: "And how is your mother?" I had made several overtures to Mamma to find out whether she would do the same when Gilberte came to us, a point which seemed to me more serious than, at the Court of Louis XIV, the use of 'Monseigneur.' But Mamma would not hear of it for a moment.

"Certainly not. I do not know Mme. Swann."

"But neither does she know you."

"I never said she did, but we are not obliged to behave in exactly the same way about everything. I shall find other ways of being civil to Gilberte than Mme. Swann has with you."

But I was unconvinced, and preferred not to invite Gilberte.

Leaving my parents, I went upstairs to change my clothes and on emptying my pockets came suddenly upon the envelope which the Swanns' butler had handed me before shewing me into the drawing-room. I was now alone. I opened it; inside was a card on which I was told the name of the lady whom I ought to have 'taken in' to luncheon.

It was about this period that Bloch overthrew my conception of the world and opened for me fresh possibilities of happiness (which, for that matter, were to change later on into possibilities of suffering), by assuring me that, in contradiction of all that I had believed at the time of my walks along the Méséglise way, women never asked for anything better than to make love. He added to this service a second, the value of which I was not to appreciate until much later; it was he who took me for the first time into a disorderly house. He had indeed told me that there were any number of pretty women whom one might enjoy. But I could see them only in a vague outline for which those houses were to enable me to substitute actual human features. So that if I owed to Bloch—for his 'good tidings' that beauty and the enjoyment of beauty were not inaccessible things, and that we have acted foolishly in renouncing them for all time—a debt of gratitude of the same kind that we owe to an optimistic physician or philosopher who has given us reason to hope for length of days in this world and not to be entirely cut off from it when we shall have passed beyond the veil, the houses of assignation which I began to frequent some years later—by furnishing me with specimens of beauty, by allowing me to add to the beauty of women that element which we are powerless to invent, which is something more than a mere summary of former beauties, that present indeed divine, the one present that we cannot bestow upon ourselves, before which faint and fail all the logical creations of our intellect, and which we can seek from reality alone: an individual charm—deserved to be ranked by me with those other benefactors more recent in origin but of comparable utility (before finding which we used to imagine without any warmth the seductive charms of Mantegna, of Wagner, of Siena, by studying other painters, hearing other composers, visiting other cities): namely illustrated editions of the history of painting, symphonic concerts and handbooks to 'Mediaeval Towns.' But the house to which Bloch led me (and which he himself, for that matter, had long ceased to visit), was of too humble a grade, its denizens were too inconspicuous and too little varied to be able to satisfy my old or to stimulate new curiosities. The mistress of this house knew none of the women with whom one asked her to negotiate, and was always suggesting others whom one did not want. She boasted to me of one in particular, one of whom, with a smile full of promise (as though this had been a great rarity and a special treat) she would whisper: "She is a Jewess! Doesn't that make you want to?" (That, by the way, was probably why the girl's name was Rachel.) And with a silly and affected excitement which, she hoped, would prove contagious, and which ended in a hoarse gurgle, almost of sensual satisfaction: "Think of that, my boy, a Jewess! Wouldn't that be lovely? Rrrr!" This Rachel, of whom I caught a glimpse without her seeing me, was dark and not good looking, but had an air of intelligence, and would pass the tip of her tongue over her lips as she smiled, with a look of boundless impertinence, at the 'boys' who were introduced to her and whom I could hear making conversation. Her small and narrow face was framed in short curls of black hair, irregular as though they were outlined in pen-strokes upon a wash-drawing in Indian ink. Every evening I promised the old woman who offered her to me with a special insistence, boasting of her superior intelligence and her education, that I would not fail to come some day on purpose to make the acquaintance of Rachel, whom I had nicknamed "Rachel when from the Lord." But the first evening I had heard her, as she was leaving the house, say to the mistress: "That's settled then; I shall be free to-morrow, if you have anyone you won't forget to send for me."

And these words had prevented me from recognising her as a person because they had made me classify her at once in a general category of women whose habit, common to all of them, was to come there in the evening to see whether there might not be a louis or two to be earned. She would simply vary her formula, saying indifferently: "If you want me" or "If you want anybody."

The mistress, who was not familiar with Halévy's opera, did not know why I always called the girl "Rachel when from the Lord." But failure to understand a joke has never yet made anyone find it less amusing, and it was always with a whole-hearted laugh that she would say to me:

"Then there's nothing doing to-night? When am I going to fix you up with 'Rachel when from the Lord'? Why do you always say that, 'Rachel when from the Lord'? Oh, that's very smart, that is. I'm going to make a match of you two. You won't be sorry for it, you'll see."

Once I was just making up my mind, but she was 'in the press,' another time in the hands of the hairdresser, an elderly gentleman who never did anything for the women except pour oil on their loosened hair and then comb it. And I grew tired of waiting, even though several of the humbler frequenters of the place (working girls, they called themselves, but they always seemed to be out of work), had come to mix drinks for me and to hold long conversations to which, despite the gravity of the subjects discussed, the partial or total nudity of the speakers gave an attractive simplicity. I ceased moreover to go to this house because, anxious to present a token of my good-will to the woman who kept it and was in need of furniture, I had given her several pieces, notably a big sofa, which I had inherited from my aunt Léonie. I used never to see them, for want of space had prevented my parents from taking them in at home, and they were stored in a warehouse. But as soon as I discovered them again in the house where these women were putting them to their own uses, all the virtues that one had imbibed in the air of my aunt's room at Combray became apparent to me, tortured by the cruel contact to which I had abandoned them in their helplessness! Had I outraged the dead, I should not have suffered such remorse. I returned no more to visit their new mistress, for they seemed to me to be alive, and to be appealing to me, like those objects, apparently inanimate, in a Persian fairy-tale, in which are embodied human souls that are undergoing martyrdom and plead for deliverance. Besides, as our memory presents things to us, as a rule, not in their chronological sequence but as it were by a reflexion in which the order of the parts is reversed, I remembered only long afterwards that it was upon that same sofa that, many years before, I had tasted for the first time the sweets of love with one of my girl cousins, with whom I had not known where to go until she somewhat rashly suggested our taking advantage of a moment in which aunt Léonie had left her room.

A whole lot more of my aunt Léonie's things, and notably a magnificent set of old silver plate, I sold, in spite of my parents' warnings, so as to have more money to spend, and to be able to send more flowers to Mme. Swann who would greet me, after receiving an immense basket of orchids, with: "If I were your father, I should have you up before the magistrate for this." How was I to suppose that one day I might regret more than anything the loss of my silver plate, and rank certain other pleasures more highly than that (which would have shrunk perhaps into none at all) of bestowing favours upon Gilberte's parents. Similarly, it was with Gilberte in my mind, and so as not to be separated from her, that I had decided not to enter a career of diplomacy abroad. It is always thus, impelled by a state of mind which is destined not to last, that we make our irrevocable decisions. I could scarcely imagine that that strange substance which was housed in Gilberte, and from her permeated her parents and her home, leaving me indifferent to all things else, could be liberated from her, could migrate into another person. The same substance, unquestionable, and yet one that would have a wholly different effect on me. For a single malady goes through various evolutions, and a delicious poison can no longer be taken with the same impunity when, with the passing of the years, the heart's power of resistance has diminished.

My parents meanwhile would have liked to see the intelligence that

Bergotte had discerned in me made manifest in some remarkable achievement. When I still did not know the Swanns I thought that I was prevented from working by the state of agitation into which I was thrown by the impossibility of seeing Gilberte when I chose. But, now that their door stood open to me, scarcely had I sat down at my desk than I would rise and run to them. And after I had left them and was at home again, my isolation was only apparent, my mind was powerless to swim against the stream of words on which I had allowed myself mechanically to be borne for hours on end. Sitting alone, I continued to fashion remarks such as might have pleased or amused the Swanns, and to make this pastime more entertaining I myself took the parts of those absent players, I put to myself imagined questions, so chosen that my brilliant epigrams served merely as happy answers to them. Though conducted in silence, this exercise was none the less a conversation and not a meditation, my solitude a mental society in which it was not I myself but other imaginary speakers who controlled my choice of words, and in which I felt as I formulated, in place of the thoughts that I believed to be true, those that came easily to my mind, and involved no introspection from without, that kind of pleasure, entirely passive, which sitting still affords to anyone who is burdened with a sluggish digestion.

Had I been less firmly resolved upon setting myself definitely to work, I should perhaps have made an effort to begin at once. But since my resolution was explicit, since within twenty-four hours, in the empty frame of that long morrow in which everything was so well arranged because I myself had not yet entered it, my good intentions would be realised without difficulty, it was better not to select an evening on which I was ill-disposed for a beginning for which the following days were not, alas, to shew themselves any more propitious. But I was reasonable. It would have been puerile, on the part of one who had waited now for years, not to put up with a postponement of two or three days. Confident that by the day after next I should have written several pages, I said not a word more to my parents of my decision; I preferred to remain patient for a few hours and then to bring to a convinced and comforted grandmother a sample of work that was already under way. Unfortunately the morrow was not that vast, external day to which I in my fever had looked forward. When it drew to a close, my laziness and my painful struggle to overcome certain internal obstacles had simply lasted twenty-four hours longer. And at the end of several days, my plans not having matured, I had no longer the same hope that they would be realised at once, no longer the courage, therefore, to subordinate everything else to their realisation: I began again to keep late hours, having no longer, to oblige me to go to bed early on any evening, the certain hope of seeing my work begun next morning. I needed, before I could recover my creative energy, several days of relaxation, and the only time that my grandmother ventured, in a gentle and disillusioned tone, to frame the reproach: "Well, and that work of yours; aren't we even to speak of it now?" I resented her intrusion, convinced that in her inability to see that my mind was irrevocably made up, she had further and perhaps for a long time postponed the execution of my task, by the shock which her denial of justice to me had given my nerves, since until I had recovered from that shock I should not feel inclined to begin my work. She felt that her scepticism had charged blindly into my intention. She apologised, kissing me: "I am sorry; I shall not say anything again," and, so that I should not be discouraged, assured me that, from the day on which I should be quite well again, the work would come of its own accord from my superfluity of strength.

Besides, I said to myself, in spending all my time with the Swanns, am I not doing exactly what Bergotte does? To my parents it seemed almost as though, idle as I was, I was leading, since it was spent in the same drawing-room with a great writer, the life most favourable to the growth of talent. And yet the assumption that anyone can be dispensed from having to create that talent for himself, from within himself, and can acquire it from some one else, is as impossible as it would be to suppose that a man can keep himself in good health, in spite of neglecting all the rules of hygiene and of indulging in the worst excesses, merely by dining out often in the company of a physician. The person, by the way, who was most completely taken in by this illusion, which misled me as well as my parents, was Mme. Swann. When I explained to her that I was unable to come, that I must stay at home and work, she looked as though she were thinking that I made a great fuss about nothing, that there was something foolish as well as ostentatious in what I had said.

"But Bergotte is coming, isn't he? Do you mean that you don't think it good, what he writes? It will be better still, very soon," she went on, "for he is more pointed, he concentrates more in newspaper articles than in his books, where he is apt to spread out too much. I've arranged that in future he's to do the leading articles in the *Figaro*. He'll be distinctly the 'right man in the right place' there." And, finally, "Come! He will tell you, better than anyone, what you ought to do."

And so, just as one invites a gentleman ranker to meet his colonel, it was in the interests of my career, and as though masterpieces of literature arose out of 'getting to know' people, that she told me not to fail to come to dinner with her next day, to meet Bergotte.

And so there was not from the Swanns any more than from my parents, that is to say from those who, at different times, had seemed bound to place obstacles in my way, any further opposition to that pleasant existence in which I might see Gilberte as often as I chose, with enjoyment if not with peace of mind. There can be no peace of mind in love, since the advantage one has secured is never anything but a fresh starting-point for further desires. So long as I had not been free to go to her, having my eyes fixed upon that inaccessible goal of happiness, I could not so much as imagine the fresh grounds for anxiety that lay in wait for me there. Once the resistance of her parents was broken, and the problem solved at last, it began to set itself anew, and always in different terms. Each evening, on arriving home, I reminded myself that I had things to say to Gilberte of prime importance, things upon which our whole friendship hung, and these things were never the same. But at least I was happy, and no further menace arose to threaten my happiness. One was to appear, alas, from a quarter in which I had never detected any peril, namely from Gilberte and myself. And yet I ought to have been tormented by what, on the contrary, reassured me, by what I mistook for happiness. We are, when we love, in an abnormal state, capable of giving at once to an accident, the most simple to all appearance and one that may at any moment occur, a serious aspect which that accident by itself would not bear. What makes us so happy is the presence in our heart of an unstable element which we are perpetually arranging to keep in position, and of which we cease almost to be aware so long as it is not displaced. Actually, there is in love a permanent strain of suffering which happiness neutralises, makes conditional only, procrastinates, but which may at any moment become what it would long since have been had we not obtained what we were seeking, sheer agony.

On several occasions I felt that Gilberte was anxious to put off my visits. It is true that when I was at all anxious to see her I had only to get myself invited by her parents who were increasingly persuaded of my excellent influence over her. "Thanks to them," I used to think, "my love is running no risk; the moment I have them on my side, I can set my mind at rest; they have full authority over Gilberte." Until, alas, I detected certain signs of impatience which she allowed to escape her when her father made me come to the house, almost against her will, and asked myself whether what I had regarded as a protection for my happiness was not in fact the secret reason why that happiness could not endure.

The last time that I called to see Gilberte, it was raining; she had been asked to a dancing lesson in the house of some people whom she knew too slightly to be able to take me there with her. In view of the dampness of the air I had taken rather more caffeine than usual. Perhaps on account of the weather, or because she had some objection to the house in which this party was being given, Mme. Swann, as her daughter was leaving the room, called her back in the sharpest of tones: "Gilberte!" and pointed to me, to indicate that I had come there to see her and that she ought to stay with me. This 'Gilberte!' had been uttered, or shouted rather, with the best of intentions towards myself, but from the way in which Gilberte shrugged her shoulders as she took off her outdoor clothes I divined that her mother had unwittingly hastened the gradual evolution, which until then it had perhaps been possible to arrest, which was gradually drawing away from me my friend. "You don't need to go out dancing every day," Odette told her daughter, with a sagacity acquired, no doubt, in earlier days, from Swann. Then, becoming once more Odette, she began speaking to her daughter in English. At once it was as though a wall had sprung up to hide from me a part of the life of Gilberte, as though an evil genius had spirited my friend far away. In a language that we know, we have substituted for the opacity of sounds, the perspicuity of ideas. But a language which we do not know is a fortress sealed, within whose walls she whom we love is free to play us false, while we, standing without, desperately alert in our impotence, can see, can prevent nothing. So this conversation in English, at which, a month earlier, I should merely have smiled, interspersed with a few proper names in French which did not fail to accentuate, to give a point to my uneasiness, had, when conducted within a few feet of me by two motionless persons, the same degree of cruelty, left me as much abandoned and alone as the forcible abduction of my companion. At length Mme. Swann left us. That day, perhaps from resentment against myself, the unwilling cause of her not going out to enjoy herself, perhaps also because, guessing her to be angry with me, I was precautionally colder than usual with her, the face of Gilberte, divested of every sign of joy, bleak, bare, pillaged, seemed all afternoon to be devoting a melancholy regret to the pas-de-quatre in which my arrival had prevented her from going to take part, and to be defying every living creature, beginning with myself, to understand the subtle reasons that had determined in her a sentimental attachment to the boston. She confined herself to exchanging with me, now and again, on the weather, the increasing violence of the rain, the fastness of the clock, a conversation punctuated with silences and monosyllables, in which I lashed myself on, with a sort of desperate rage, to the destruction of those moments which we might have devoted to friendship and happiness. And on each of our remarks was stamped, as it were, a supreme harshness, by the paroxysm of their stupefying unimportance, which at the same time consoled me, for it prevented Gilberte from being taken in by the banality of my observations and the indifference of my tone. In vain was my polite: "I thought, the other day, that the clock was slow, if anything"; she evidently understood me to mean: "How tiresome you are being!" Obstinately as I might protract, over the whole length of that rain-sodden afternoon, the dull cloud of words through which no fitful ray shone, I knew that my coldness was not so unalterably fixed as I pretended, and that Gilberte must be fully aware that if, after already saying it to her three times, I had hazarded a fourth repetition of the statement that the evenings were drawing in, I should have had difficulty in restraining myself from bursting into tears. When she was like that, when no smile filled her eyes or unveiled her face, I cannot describe the devastating monotony that stamped her melancholy eyes and sullen features. Her face, grown almost livid, reminded me then of those dreary beaches where the sea, ebbing far out, wearies one with its faint shimmering, everywhere the same, fixed in an immutable and low horizon. At length, as I saw no sign in Gilberte of the happy change for which I had been waiting now for some hours, I told her that she was not being nice. "It is you that are not being nice," was her answer. "Oh, but surely——!" I asked myself what I could have done, and, finding no answer, put the question to her. "Naturally, you think yourself nice!" she said to me with a laugh, and went on laughing. Whereupon I felt all the anguish that there was for me in not being able to attain to that other, less perceptible, plane of her mind which her laughter indicated. It seemed, that laughter, to mean: "No, no, I'm not going to let myself be moved by anything that you say, I know you're madly in love with me, but that leaves me neither hot nor cold, for I don't care a rap for you." But I told myself that, after all, laughter was not a language so well defined that I could be certain of understanding what this laugh really meant. And Gilberte's words were affectionate. "But how am I not being nice?" I asked her. "Tell me; I will do anything you want." "No; that wouldn't be any good. I can't explain." For a moment I was afraid that she thought that I did not love her, and this was for me a fresh agony, no less keen, but one that required treatment by a different conversational method. "If you knew how much you were hurting me you would tell me." But this pain which, had she doubted my love for her, must have rejoiced her, seemed instead to make her more angry. Then, realising my mistake, making up my mind to pay no more attention to what she said, letting her (without bothering to believe her) assure me: "I do love you, indeed I do; you will see one day," (that day on which the guilty are convinced that their innocence will be made clear, and which, for some mysterious reason, never happens to be the day on which their evidence is taken), I had the courage to make a sudden resolution not to see her again, and without telling her of it yet since she would not have believed me.

Grief that is caused one by a person with whom one is in love can be bitter, even when it is interpolated among preoccupations, occupations, pleasures in which that person is not directly involved and from which our attention is diverted only now and again to return to it. But when such a grief has its birth—as was now happening—at a moment when the happiness of seeing that person fills us to the exclusion of all else, the sharp depression that then affects our spirits, sunny hitherto, sustained and calm, lets loose in us a raging tempest against which we know not whether we are capable of struggling to the end. The tempest that was blowing in my heart was so violent that I made my way home baffled, battered, feeling that I could recover my breath only by retracing my steps, by returning, upon whatever pretext, into Gilberte's presence. But she would have said to herself: "Back again! Evidently I can go to any length with him; he will come back every time, and the more wretched he is when he leaves me the more docile he'll be." Besides, I was irresistibly drawn towards her in thought, and those alternative orientations, that mad careering between them of the compass-needle within me, persisted after I had reached home, and expressed themselves in the mutually contradictory letters to Gilberte which I began to draft.

I was about to pass through one of those difficult crises which we generally find that we have to face at various stages in life, and which, for all that there has been no change in our character, in our nature (that nature which itself creates our loves, and almost creates the women whom we love, even to their faults), we do not face in the same way on each occasion, that is to say at every age. At such moments our life is divided, and so to speak distributed over a pair of scales, in two counterpoised pans which between them contain it all. In one there is our desire not to displease, not to appear too humble to the creature whom we love without managing to understand her, but whom we find it more convenient at times to appear almost to disregard, so that she shall not have that sense of her own indispensability which may turn her from us; in the other scale there is a feeling of pain—and one that is not localised and partial only—which cannot be set at rest unless, abandoning every thought of pleasing the woman and of making her believe that we can dispense with her, we go at once to find her. When we withdraw from the pan in which our pride lies a small quantity of the will-power which we have weakly allowed to exhaust itself with increasing age, when we add to the pan that holds our suffering a physical pain which we have acquired and have let grow, then, instead of the courageous solution that would have carried the day at one-and-twenty, it is the other, grown too heavy and insufficiently balanced, that crushes us down at fifty. All the more because situations, while repeating themselves, tend to alter, and there is every likelihood that, in middle life or in old age, we shall have had the grim satisfaction of complicating our love by an intrusion of habit which adolescence, repressed by other demands upon it, less master of itself, has never known.

I had just written Gilberte a letter in which I allowed the tempest of my wrath to thunder, not however without throwing her the lifebuoy of a few words disposed as though by accident on the page, by clinging to which my friend might be brought to a reconciliation; a moment later, the wind having changed, they were phrases full of love that I addressed to her, chosen for the sweetness of certain forlorn expressions, those 'nevermores' so touching to those who pen them, so wearisome to her who will have to read them, whether she believe them to be false and translate 'nevermore' by 'this very evening, if you want me,' or believe them to be true and so to be breaking the news to her of one of those final separations which make so little difference to our lives when the other person is one with whom we are not in love. But since we are incapable, while we are in love, of acting as fit predecessors of the next persons whom we shall presently have become, and who will then be in love no longer, how are we to imagine the actual state of mind of a woman whom, even when we are conscious that we are of no account to her, we have perpetually represented in our musings as uttering, so as to lull us into a happy dream or to console us for a great sorrow, the same speeches that she would make if she loved us. When we come to examine the thoughts, the actions of a woman whom we love, we are as completely at a loss as must have been, face to face with the phenomena of nature, the world's first natural philosophers, before their science had been elaborated and had cast a ray of light over the unknown. Or, worse still, we are like a person in whose mind the law of causality barely exists, a person who would be incapable, therefore, of establishing any connexion between one phenomenon and another, to whose eyes the spectacle of the world would appear unstable as a dream. Of course I made efforts to emerge from this incoherence, to find reasons for things. I tried even to be 'objective' and, to that end, to bear well in mind the disproportion that existed between the importance which Gilberte had in my eyes and that, not only which I had in hers, but which she herself had in the eyes of other people, a disproportion which, had I failed to remark it, would have involved my mistaking mere friendliness on my friend's part for a passionate avowal, and a grotesque and debasing display on my own for the simple and graceful movement with which we are attracted towards a pretty face. But I was afraid also of falling into the contrary error, in which I should have seen in Gilberte's unpunctuality in keeping an appointment an irremediable hostility. I tried to discover between these two perspectives, equally distorting, a third which would enable me to see things as they really were; the calculations I was obliged to make with that object helped to take my mind off my sufferings; and whether in obedience to the laws of arithmetic or because I had made them give me the answer that I desired, I made up my mind that next day I would go to the Swanns', happy, but happy in the same way as people who, having long been tormented by the thought of a journey which they have not wished to make, go no farther than to the station and return home to unpack their boxes. And since, while one is hesitating, the bare idea of a possible resolution (unless one has rendered that idea sterile by deciding that one will make no resolution) develops, like a seed in the ground, the lineaments, every detail of the emotions that will be born from the performance of the action, I told myself that it had been quite absurd of me to be as much hurt by the suggestion that I should not see Gilberte again as if I had really been about to put that suggestion into practice, and that since, on the contrary, I was to end by returning to her side, I might have saved myself the expense of all those vain longings and painful acceptances. But this resumption of friendly relations lasted only so long as it took me to reach the Swanns'; not because their butler, who was really fond of me, told me that Gilberte had gone out (a statement the truth of which was confirmed, as it happened, the same evening, by people who had seen her somewhere), but because of the manner in which he said it. "Sir, the young lady is not at home; I can assure you, sir, that I am speaking the truth. If you wish to make any inquiries I can fetch the young lady's maid. You know very well, sir, that I would do everything in my power to oblige you, and that if the young lady was at home I would take you to her at once." These words being of the only kind that is really important, that is to say spontaneous, the kind that gives us a radiograph shewing the main points, at any rate, of the unimaginable reality which would be wholly concealed beneath a prepared speech, proved that in Gilberte's household there was an impression that I bothered her with my visits; and so, scarcely had the man uttered them before they had aroused in me a hatred of which I preferred to make him rather than Gilberte the victim; he drew upon his own head all the angry feelings that I might have had for my friend; freed from these complications, thanks to his words, my love subsisted alone; but his words had, at the same time, shewn me that I must cease for the present to attempt to see Gilberte. She would be certain to write to me, to apologise. In spite of which, I should not return at once to see her, so as to prove to her that I was capable of living without her. Besides, once I had received her letter, Gilberte's society was a thing with which I should be more easily able to dispense for a time, since I should be certain of finding her ready to receive me whenever I chose. All that I needed in order to support with less pain the burden of a voluntary separation was to feel that my heart was rid of the terrible uncertainty whether we were not irreconcilably sundered, whether she had not promised herself to another, left Paris, been taken away by force. The days that followed resembled the first week of that old New Year which I had had to spend alone, without Gilberte. But when that week had dragged to its end, then for one thing my friend would be coming again to the Champs-Elysées, I should be seeing her as before; I had been sure of that; for another thing, I had known with no less certainty that so long as the New Year holidays lasted it would not be worth my while to go to the Champs-Elysées, which meant that during that miserable week, which was already ancient history, I had endured my wretchedness with a quiet mind because there was blended in it neither fear nor hope. Now, on the other hand, it was the latter of these which, almost as much as my fear of what might happen, rendered intolerable the burden of my grief. Not having had any letter from Gilberte that evening, I had attributed this to her carelessness, to her other occupations, I did not doubt that I should find something from her in the morning's post. This I awaited, every day, with a beating heart which subsided, leaving me utterly prostrate, when I had found in it only letters from people who were not Gilberte, or else nothing at all, which was no worse, the proofs of another's friendship making all the more cruel those of her indifference. I transferred my hopes to the afternoon post. Even between the times at which letters were delivered I dared not leave the house, for she might be sending hers by a messenger. Then, the time coming at last when neither the postman nor a footman from the Swanns' could possibly appear that night, I must procrastinate my hope of being set at rest, and thus, because I believed that my sufferings were not destined to last, I was obliged, so to speak, incessantly to renew them. My disappointment was perhaps the same, but instead of just uniformly prolonging, as in the old days, an initial emotion, it began again several times daily, starting each time with an emotion so frequently renewed that it ended—it, so purely physical, so instantaneous a state—by becoming stabilised, so consistently that the strain of waiting having hardly time to relax before a fresh reason for waiting supervened, there was no longer a single minute in the day in which I was not in that state of anxiety which it is so difficult to bear even for an hour. So my punishment was infinitely more cruel than in those New Year holidays long ago, because this time there was in me, instead of the acceptance, pure and simple, of that punishment, the hope, at every moment, of seeing it come to an end. And yet at this state of acceptance I ultimately arrived; then I understood that it must be final, and I renounced Gilberte for ever, in the interests of my love itself and because I hoped above all that she would not retain any contemptuous memory of me. Indeed, from that moment, so that she should not be led to suppose any sort of lover's spite on my part, when she made appointments for me to see her I used often to accept them and then, at the last moment, write to her that I was prevented from coming, but with the same protestations of my disappointment that I should have made to anyone whom I had not wished to see. These expressions of regret, which we keep as a rule for people who do not matter, would do more, I imagined, to persuade Gilberte of my indifference than would the tone of indifference which we affect only to those whom we love. When, better than by mere words, by a course of action indefinitely repeated, I should have proved to her that I had no appetite for seeing her, perhaps she would discover once again an appetite for seeing me. Alas! I was doomed to failure; to attempt, by ceasing to see her, to reawaken in her that inclination to see me was to lose her for ever; first of all, because, when it began to revive, if I wished it to last I must not give way to it at once; besides, the most agonising hours would then have passed; it was at this very moment that she was indispensable to me, and I should have liked to be able to warn her that what presently she would have to assuage, by the act of seeing me again, would be a grief so far diminished as to be no longer (what a moment ago it would still have been), nor the thought of putting an end to it, a motive towards surrender, reconciliation, further meetings. And then again, later on, when I should at last be able safely to confess to Gilberte (so far would her liking for me have regained its strength) my liking for her, the latter, not having been able to resist the strain of so long a separation, would have ceased to exist; Gilberte would have become immaterial to me. I knew this, but I could not explain it to her; she would have assumed that if I was pretending that I should cease to love her if I remained for too long without seeing her, that was solely in order that she might summon me back to her at once. In the meantime, what made it easier for me to sentence myself to this separation was the fact that (in order to make it quite clear to her that despite my protestations to the contrary it was my own free will and not any conflicting engagement, not the state of my health that prevented me from seeing her), whenever I knew beforehand that Gilberte would not be in the house, was going out somewhere with a friend and would not be home for dinner, I went to see Mme. Swann who had once more become to me what she had been at the time when I had such difficulty in seeing her daughter and (on days when the latter was not coming to the Champs-Elysées) used to repair to the Allée des Acacias. In this way I should be hearing about Gilberte, and could be certain that she would in due course hear about me, and in terms which would shew her that I was not interested in her. And I found, as all those who suffer find, that my melancholy condition might have been worse. For being free at any time to enter the habitation in which Gilberte dwelt, I constantly reminded myself, for all that I was firmly resolved to make no use of that privilege, that if ever my pain grew too sharp there was a way of making it cease. I was not unhappy, save only from day to day. And even that is an exaggeration. How many times in an hour (but now without that anxious expectancy which had strained every nerve of me in the first weeks after our quarrel, before I had gone again to the Swanns') did I not repeat to myself the words of the letter which, one day soon, Gilberte would surely send, would perhaps even bring to me herself. The perpetual vision of that imagined happiness helped me to endure the desolation of my real happiness. With women who do not love us, as with the 'missing,' the knowledge that there is no hope left does not prevent our continuing to wait for news. We live on tenterhooks, starting at the slightest sound; the mother whose son has gone to sea on some perilous voyage of discovery sees him in imagination every moment, long after the fact of his having perished has been established, striding into the room, saved by a miracle and in the best of health. And this strain of waiting, according to the strength of her memory and the resistance of her bodily organs, either helps her on her journey through the years, at the end of which she will be able to endure the knowledge that her son is no more, to forget gradually and to survive his loss, or else it kills her.

On the other hand, my grief found consolation in the idea that my love must profit by it. Each visit that I paid to Mme. Swann without seeing Gilberte was a cruel punishment, but I felt that it correspondingly enhanced the idea that Gilberte had of me.

Besides, if I always took care, before going to see Mme. Swann, that there should be no risk of her daughter's appearing, that arose, it is true, from my determination to break with her, but no less perhaps from that hope of reconciliation which overlay my intention to renounce her (very few of such intentions are absolute, at least in a continuous form, in this human soul of ours, one of whose laws, confirmed by the unlooked-for wealth of illustration that memory supplies, is intermittence), and hid from me all that in it was unbearably cruel. As for that hope, I saw clearly how far it was chimerical. I was like a pauper who moistens his dry crust with fewer tears if he assures himself that, at any moment, a total stranger is perhaps going to leave him the whole of his fortune. We are all of us obliged, if we are to make reality endurable, to nurse a few little follies in ourselves. Now my hope remained more intact—while at the same time our separation became more effectual—if I refrained from meeting Gilberte. If I had found myself face to face with her in her mother's drawing-room, we might perhaps have uttered irrevocable words which would have rendered our breach final, killed my hope and, on the other hand, by creating a fresh anxiety, reawakened my love and made resignation harder.

Ever so long ago, before I had even thought of breaking with her daughter, Mme. Swann had said to me: "It is all very well your coming to see Gilberte; I should like you to come sometimes for my sake, not to my 'kettledrums,' which would bore you because there is such a crowd, but on the other days, when you will always find me at home if you come fairly late." So that I might be thought, when I came to see her, to be yielding only after a long resistance to a desire which she had expressed in the past. And very late in the afternoon, when it was quite dark, almost at the hour at which my parents would be sitting down to dinner, I would set out to pay Mme. Swann a visit, in the course of which I knew that I should not see Gilberte, and yet should be thinking only of her. In that quarter, then looked upon as remote, of a Paris darker than Paris is to-day, where even in the centre there was no electric light in the public thoroughfares and very little in private houses, the lamps of a drawing-room situated on the ground level, or but slightly raised above it, as were the rooms in which Mme. Swann generally received her visitors, were enough to lighten the street, and to make the passer-by raise his eyes, connecting with their glow, as with its apparent though hidden cause, the presence outside the door of a string of smart broughams. This passer-by was led to believe, not without a certain emotion, that a modification had been effected in this mysterious cause, when he saw one of the carriages begin to move; but it was merely a coachman who, afraid of his horses' catching cold, started them now and again on a brisk walk, all the more impressive because the rubber-tired wheels gave the sound of their hooves a background of silence from which it stood out more distinct and more explicit.

The 'winter-garden,' of which in those days the passer-by generally caught a glimpse, in whatever street he might be walking, if the drawing-room did not stand too high above the pavement, is to be seen to-day only in photogravures in the gift-books of P. J. Stahl, where, in contrast to the infrequent floral decorations of the Louis XVI drawing-rooms now in fashion—a single rose or a Japanese iris in a long-necked vase of crystal into which it would be impossible to squeeze a second—it seems, because of the profusion of indoor plants which people had then, and of the absolute want of style in their arrangement, as though it must have responded in the ladies whose houses it adorned to some living and delicious passion for botany rather than to any cold concern for lifeless decoration. It suggested to one, only on a larger scale, in the houses of those days, those tiny, portable hothouses laid out on New Year's morning beneath the lighted lamp—for the children were always too impatient to wait for daylight—among all the other New Year's presents but the loveliest of them all, consoling them with its real plants which they could tend as they grew for the bareness of the winter soil; and even more than those little houses themselves, those winter-gardens were like the hothouse that the children could see there at the same time, portrayed in a delightful book, another of their presents, and one which, for all that it was given not to them but to Mlle. Lili, the heroine of the story, enchanted them to such a pitch that even now, when they are almost old men and women, they ask themselves whether, in those fortunate years, winter was not the loveliest of the seasons. And inside there, beyond the winter-garden, through the various kinds of arborescence which from the street made the lighted window appear like the glass front of one of those children's playthings, pictured or real, the passer-by, drawing himself up on tiptoe, would generally observe a man in a frock coat, a gardenia or a carnation in his buttonhole, standing before a seated lady, both vaguely outlined, like two intaglios cut in a topaz, in the depths of the drawing-room atmosphere clouted by the samovar—then a recent importation—with steam which may very possibly be escaping from it still to-day, but to which, if it does, we are grown so accustomed now that no one notices it. Mme. Swann attached great importance to her 'tea'; she thought that she shewed her originality and expressed her charm when she said to a man, "You will find me at home any day, fairly late; come to tea!" so that she allowed a sweet and delicate smile to accompany the words which she pronounced with a fleeting trace of English accent, and which her listener duly noted, bowing solemnly in acceptance, as though the invitation had been something important and uncommon which commanded deference and required attention. There was another reason, apart from those given already, for the flowers' having more than a merely ornamental part in Mme. Swann's drawing-room, and this reason pertained not to the period, but, in some degree, to the former life of Odette. A great courtesan, such as she had been, lives largely for her lovers, that is to say at home, which means that she comes in time to live for her home. The things that one sees in the house of a 'respectable' woman, things which may of course appear to her also to be of importance, are those which are in any event of the utmost importance to the courtesan. The culminating point of her day is not the moment in which she dresses herself for all the world to see, but that in which she undresses herself for a man. She must be as smart in her wrapper, in her nightgown, as in her outdoor attire. Other women display their jewels, but as for her, she lives in the intimacy of her pearls. This kind of existence imposes on her as an obligation and ends by giving her a fondness for luxury which is secret, that is to say which comes near to being disinterested. Mme. Swann extended this to include her flowers. There was always beside her chair an immense bowl of crystal filled to the brim with Parma violets or with long white daisy-petals scattered upon the water, which seemed to be testifying, in the eyes of the arriving guest, to some favourite and interrupted occupation, such as the cup of tea which Mme. Swann would, for her own amusement, have been drinking there by herself; an occupation more intimate still and more mysterious, so much so that one felt oneself impelled to apologise on seeing the flowers exposed there by her side, as one would have apologised for looking at the title of the still open book which would have revealed to one what had just been read by—and so, perhaps, what was still in the mind of Odette. And unlike the book the flowers were living things; it was annoying, when one entered the room to pay Mme. Swann a visit, to discover that she was not alone, or if one came home with her not to find the room empty, so prominent a place in it, enigmatic and intimately associated with hours in the life of their mistress of which one knew nothing, did those flowers assume which had not been made ready for Odette's visitors but, as it were, forgotten there by her, had held and would hold with her again private conversations which one was afraid of disturbing, the secret of which one tried in vain to read, fastening one's eyes on the moist purple, the still liquid water-colour of the Parma violets. By the end of October Odette would begin to come home with the utmost punctuality for tea, which was still known, at that time, as 'five-o'clock tea,' having once heard it said, and being fond of repeating that if Mme. Verdurin had been able to form a salon it was because people were always certain of finding her at home at the same hour. She imagined that she herself had one also, of the same kind, but freer, *senza rigore* as she used to say. She saw herself figuring thus as a sort of Lespinasse, and believed that she had founded a rival salon by taking from the du Deffant of the little group several of her most attractive men, notably Swann himself, who had followed her in her secession and into her retirement, according to a version for which one can understand that she had succeeded in gaining credit among her more recent friends, ignorant of what had passed, though without convincing herself. But certain favourite parts are played by us so often before the public and rehearsed so carefully when we are alone that we find it easier to refer to their fictitious testimony than to that of a reality which we have almost entirely forgotten. On days on which Mme. Swann had not left the house, one found her in a wrapper of *crêpe-de-Chine,* white as the first snows of winter, or, it might be, in one of those long pleated garments of *mousseline-de-soie,* which seemed nothing more than a shower of white or rosy petals, and would be regarded to-day as hardly suitable for winter, though quite wrongly. For these light fabrics and soft colours gave to a woman—in the stifling warmth of the drawing-rooms of those days, with their heavily curtained doors, rooms of which the most effective thing that the society novelists of the time could find to say was that they were 'exquisitely cushioned'—the same air of coolness that they gave to the roses which were able to stay in the room there by her side, despite the winter, in the glowing flesh tints of their nudity, as though it were already spring. By reason of the muffling of all sound in the carpets, and of the remoteness of her cosy retreat, the lady of the house, not being apprised of your entry as she is to-day, would continue to read almost until you were standing before her chair, which enhanced still further that sense of the romantic, that charm of a sort of secret discovery, which we find to-day in the memory of those gowns, already out of fashion even then, which Mme. Swann was perhaps alone in not having discarded, and which give us the feeling that the woman who wore them must have been the heroine of a novel because most of us have scarcely set eyes on them outside the pages of certain of Henry Gréville's tales. Odette had, at this time, in her drawing-room, when winter began, chrysanthemums of enormous size and a variety of colours such as Swann, in the old days, certainly never saw in her drawing-room in the Rue La Pérouse. My admiration for them—when I went to pay Mme. Swann one of those melancholy visits during which, prompted by my sorrow, I discovered in her all the mystical poetry of her character as the mother of that Gilberte to whom she would say on the morrow: "Your friend came to see me yesterday,"—sprang, no doubt, from my sense that, rose-pale like the Louis XIV silk that covered her chairs, snow-white like her *crêpe-de-Chine* wrapper, or of a metallic red like her samovar, they superimposed upon the decoration of the room another, a supplementary scheme of decoration, as rich, as delicate in its colouring, but one which was alive and would last for a few days only. But I was touched to find that these chrysanthemums appeared less ephemeral than, one might almost say, lasting, when I compared them with the tones, as pink, as coppery, which the setting sun so gorgeously displays amid the mists of a November afternoon, and which, after seeing them, before I had entered the house, fade from the sky, I found again inside, prolonged, transposed on to the flaming palette of the flowers. Like the fires caught and fixed by a great colourist from the impermanence of the atmosphere and the sun, so that they should enter and adorn a human dwelling, they invited me, those chrysanthemums, to put away all my sorrows and to taste with a greedy rapture during that 'tea-time' the too fleeting joys of November, of which they set ablaze all around me the intimate and mystical glory. Alas, it was not in the conversations to which I must listen that I could hope to attain to that glory; they had but little in common with it. Even with Mme. Cottard, and although it was growing late, Mme. Swann would assume her most caressing manner to say: "Oh, no, it's not late, really; you mustn't look at the clock; that's not the right time; it's stopped; you can't possibly have anything else to do now, why be in such a hurry?" as she pressed a final tartlet upon the Professor's wife, who was gripping her card-case in readiness for flight.

"One simply can't tear oneself away from this house!" observed Mme. Bontemps to Mme. Swann, while Mme. Cottard, in her astonishment at hearing her own thought put into words, exclaimed: "Why, that's just what I always say myself, what I tell my own little judge, in the court of conscience!" winning the applause of the gentlemen from the Jockey Club, who had been profuse in their salutations, as though confounded at such an honour's being done them, when Mme. Swann had introduced them to this common and by no means attractive little woman, who kept herself, when confronted with Odette's brilliant friends, in reserve, if not on what she herself called 'the defensive,' for she always used stately language to describe the simplest happenings. "I should never have suspected it," was Mme. Swann's comment, "three Wednesdays running you've played me false." "That's quite true, Odette; it's simply ages, it's an eternity since I saw you last. You see, I plead guilty; but I must tell you," she went on with a vague suggestion of outraged modesty, for although a doctor's wife she would never have dared to speak without periphrasis of rheumatism or of a chill on the kidneys, "that I have had a lot of little troubles. As we all have, I dare say. And besides that I've had a crisis among my masculine domestics. I'm sure, I'm no more imbued with a sense of my own authority than most ladies; still I've been obliged, just to make an example you know, to give my Vatel notice; I believe he was looking out anyhow for a more remunerative place. But his departure nearly brought about the resignation of my entire ministry. My own maid refused to stay in the house a moment longer; oh, we have had some Homeric scenes. However I held fast to the reins through thick and thin; the whole affair's been a perfect lesson, which won't be lost on me, I can tell you. I'm afraid I'm boring you with all these stories about servants, but you know as well as I do what a business it is when one is obliged to set about rearranging one's household.

"Aren't we to see anything of your delicious child?" she wound up. "No, my delicious child is dining with a friend," replied Mme. Swann, and then, turning to me: "I believe she's written to you, asking you to come and see her to-morrow. And your babies?" she went on to Mme. Cottard. I breathed a sigh of relief. These words by which Mme. Swann proved to me that I could see Gilberte whenever I chose gave me precisely the comfort which I had come to seek, and which at that time made my visits to Mme. Swann so necessary. "No, I'm afraid not; I shall write to her, anyhow, this evening. Gilberte and I never seem to see one another now," I added, pretending to attribute our separation to some mysterious agency, which gave me a further illusion of being in love, supported as well by the affectionate way in which I spoke of Gilberte and she of me. "You know, she's simply devoted to you," said Mme. Swann. "Really, you won't come to-morrow?" Suddenly my heart rose on wings; the thought had just struck me—"After all, why shouldn't I, since it's her own mother who suggests it?" But with the thought I fell back into my old depression.

I was afraid now lest, when she saw me again, Gilberte might think that my indifference of late had been feigned, and it seemed wiser to prolong our separation. During these asides Mme. Bontemps had been complaining of the insufferable dulness of politicians' wives, for she pretended to find everyone too deadly or too stupid for words, and to deplore her husband's official position. "Do you mean to say you can shake hands with fifty doctors' wives, like that, one after the other?" she exclaimed to Mme. Cottard, who, unlike her, was full of the kindest feelings for everybody and of determination to do her duty in every respect. "Ah! you're a law-abiding woman! You see, in my case, at the Ministry, don't you know, I simply have to keep it up, of course. It's too much for me, I can tell you; you know what those officials' wives are like, it's all I can do not to put my tongue out at them. And my niece Albertine is just like me. You really wouldn't believe the impudence that girl has. Last week, on my 'day,' I had the wife of the Under Secretary of State for Finance, who told us that she knew nothing at all about cooking. 'But surely, ma'am,' my niece chipped in with her most winning smile, 'you ought to know everything about it, after all the dishes your father had to wash.' " "Oh, I do love that story; I think it's simply exquisite!" cried Mme. Swann. "But certainly on the Doctor's consultation days you should make a point of being 'at home,' among your flowers and books and all your pretty things," she urged Mme. Cottard. "Straight out like that! Bang! Right in the face; bang! She made no bones about it, I can tell you! And she'd never said a word to me about it, the little wretch; she's as cunning as a monkey. You are lucky to be able to control yourself; I do envy people who can hide what is in their minds." "But I've no need to do that, Mme. Bontemps, I'm not so hard to please," Mme. Cottard gently expostulated. "For one thing, I'm not in such a privileged position," she went on, slightly raising her voice as was her custom, as though she were underlining the point of her remark, whenever she slipped into the conversation any of those delicate courtesies, those skilful flatteries which won her the admiration and assisted the career of her husband. "And besides I'm only too glad to do anything that can be of use to the Professor."

"But, my dear, it isn't what one's glad to do; it's what one is able to do! I expect you're not nervous. Do you know, whenever I see the War Minister's wife making faces, I start copying her at once. It's a dreadful thing to have a temperament like mine."

"To be sure, yes," said Mme. Cottard, "I've heard people say that she had a twitch; my husband knows someone else who occupies a very high position, and it's only natural, when gentlemen get talking together . . ."

"And then, don't you know, it's just the same with the Chief of the Registry; he's a hunchback. Whenever he comes to see me, before he's been in the room five minutes my fingers are itching to stroke his hump. My husband says I'll cost him his place. What if I do! A fig for the Ministry! Yes, a fig for the Ministry! I should like to have that printed as a motto on my notepaper. I can see I am shocking you; you're so frightfully proper, but I must say there's nothing amuses me like a little devilry now and then. Life would be dreadfully monotonous without it."

And she went on talking about the Ministry all the time, as though it had been Mount Olympus. To change the conversation, Mme. Swann turned to Mme. Cottard: "But you're looking very smart to-day. Redfern *fecit?*"

"No, you know, I always swear by Rauthnitz. Besides, it's only an old thing I've had done up." "Not really! It's charming!"

"Guess how much. . . . No, change the first figure!"

"You don't say so! Why, that's nothing; it's given away! Three times that at least, I should have said." "You see how history comes to be written," apostrophised the doctor's wife. And pointing to a neck-ribbon which had been a present from Mme. Swann: "Look, Odette! Do you recognise this?"

Through the gap between a pair of curtains a head peeped with ceremonious deference, making a playful pretence of being afraid of disturbing the party; it was Swann. "Odette, the Prince d'Agrigente is with me in the study. He wants to know if he may pay his respects to you. What am I to tell him?" "Why, that I shall be delighted," Odette would reply, secretly flattered, but without losing anything of the composure which came to her all the more easily since she had always, even in her 'fast' days, been accustomed to entertain men of fashion. Swann disappeared to deliver the message, and would presently return with the Prince, unless in the meantime Mme. Verdurin had arrived. When he married Odette Swann had insisted on her ceasing to frequent the little clan. (He had several good reasons for this stipulation, though, had he had none, he would have made it just the same in obedience to a law of ingratitude which admits no exception, and proves that every 'go-between' is either lacking in foresight or else singularly disinterested.) He had conceded only that Odette and Mme. Verdurin might exchange visits once a year, and even this seemed excessive to some of the 'faithful,' indignant at the insult offered to the 'Mistress' who for so many years had treated Odette and even Swann himself as the spoiled children of her house. For if it contained false brethren who 'failed' upon certain evenings in order that they might secretly accept an invitation from Odette, ready, in the event of discovery, with the excuse that they were anxious to meet Bergotte (although the Mistress assured them that he never went to the Swanns', and even if he did, had no vestige of talent, really—in spite of which she was making the most strenuous efforts, to quote one of her favourite expressions, to 'attract' him), the little group had its 'die-hards' also. And these, though ignorant of those conventional refinements which often dissuade people from the extreme attitude one would have liked to see them adopt in order to annoy some one else, would have wished Mme. Verdurin, but had never managed to prevail upon her, to sever all connection with Odette, and thus deprive Odette of the satisfaction of saying, with a mocking laugh: "We go to the Mistress's very seldom now, since the Schism. It was all very well while my husband was still a bachelor, but when one is married, you know, it isn't always so easy. . . . If you must know, M. Swann can't abide old Ma Verdurin, and he wouldn't much like the idea of my going there regularly, as I used to. And I, as a dutiful spouse, don't you see . . . ?"

Swann would accompany his wife to their annual evening there but would take care not to be in the room when Mme. Verdurin came to call. And so, if the 'Mistress' was in the drawing-room, the Prince d'Agrigente would enter it alone. Alone, too, he was presented to her by Odette, who preferred that Mme. Verdurin should be left in ignorance of the names of her humbler guests, and so might, seeing more than one strange face in the room, be led to believe that she was mixing with the cream of the aristocracy, a device which proved so far successful that Mme. Verdurin said to her husband, that evening, with profound contempt: "Charming people, her friends! I met all the fine flower of the Reaction!" Odette was living, with respect to Mme. Verdurin, under a converse illusion. Not that the latter's salon had ever begun, at that time, to develop into what we shall one day see it to have become. Mme. Verdurin had not yet reached the period of incubation in which one dispenses with one's big parties, where the few brilliant specimens recently acquired would be lost in too numerous a crowd, and prefers to wait until the generative force of the ten righteous whom one has succeeded in attracting shall have multiplied those ten seventyfold. As Odette was not to be long now in doing, Mme. Verdurin did indeed entertain the idea of 'Society' as her final objective, but her zone of attack was as yet so restricted, and moreover so remote from that in which Odette had some chance of arriving at an identical goal, of breaking the line of defence, that the latter remained absolutely ignorant of the strategic plans which the 'Mistress' was elaborating. And it was with the most perfect sincerity that Odette, when anyone spoke to her of Mme. Verdurin as a snob, would answer, laughing, "Oh, no, quite the opposite! For one thing, she never gets a chance of being a snob; she doesn't know anyone. And then, to do her justice, I must say that she seems quite pleased not to know anyone. No, what she likes are her Wednesdays, and people who talk well." And in her heart of hearts she envied Mme. Verdurin (for all that she did not despair of having herself, in so eminent a school, succeeded in acquiring them) those arts to which the 'Mistress' attached such paramount importance, albeit they did but discriminate between shades of the Non-existent, sculpture the void, and were, properly speaking, the Arts of Nonentity: to wit those, in the lady of a house, of knowing how to 'bring people together,' how to 'group,' to 'draw out,' to 'keep in the background,' to act as a 'connecting link.'

In any case, Mme. Swann's friends were impressed when they saw in her house a lady of whom they were accustomed to think only as in her own, in an inseparable setting of her guests, amid the whole of her little group which they were astonished to behold thus suggested, summarised, assembled, packed into a single armchair in the bodily form of the 'Mistress,' the hostess turned visitor, muffled in her cloak with its grebe trimming, as shaggy as the white skins that carpeted that drawing-room embowered in which Mme. Verdurin was a drawing-room in herself. The more timid among the women thought it prudent to retire, and using the plural, as people do when they mean to hint to the rest of the room that it is wiser not to tire a convalescent who is out of bed for the first time: "Odette," they murmured, "we are going to leave you." They envied Mme.

Cottard, whom the 'Mistress' called by her Christian name. "Can I drop you anywhere?" Mme. Verdurin asked her, unable to bear the thought that one of the faithful was going to remain behind instead of following her from the room. "Oh, but this lady has been so very kind as to say, she'll take me," replied Mme. Cottard, not wishing to appear to be forgetting, when approached by a more illustrious personage, that she had accepted the offer which Mme. Bontemps had made of driving her home behind her cockaded coachman. "I must say that I am always specially grateful to the friends who are so kind as to take me with them in their vehicles. It is a regular godsend to me, who have no Automedon." "Especially," broke in the 'Mistress,' who felt that she must say something, since she knew Mme. Bontemps slightly and had just invited her to her Wednesdays, "as at Mme. de Crécy's house you're not very near home. Oh, good gracious, I shall never get into the way of saying Mme. Swann!" It was a recognised pleasantry in the little clan, among those who were not overendowed with wit, to pretend that they could never grow used to saying 'Mme. Swann.' "I have been so accustomed to saying Mme. de Crécy that I nearly went wrong again!" Only Mme. Verdurin, when she spoke to Odette, was not content with the nearly, but went wrong on purpose. "Don't you feel afraid, Odette, living out in the wilds like this? I'm sure I shouldn't feel at all comfortable, coming home after dark. Besides, it's so damp. It can't be at all good for your husband's eczema. You haven't rats in the house, I hope!" "Oh, dear no. What a horrid idea!" "That's a good thing; I was told you had. I'm glad to know it's not true, because I have a perfect horror of the creatures, and I should never have come to see you again. Good-bye, my dear child, we shall meet again soon; you know what a pleasure it is to me to see you. You don't know how to put your chrysanthemums in water," she went on, as she prepared to leave the room, Mme. Swann having risen to escort her. "They are Japanese flowers; you must arrange them the same way as the Japanese." "I do not agree with Mme. Verdurin, although she is the Law and the Prophets to me in all things! There's no one like you, Odette, for finding such lovely chrysanthemums, or chrysanthema rather, for it seems that's what we ought to call them now," declared Mme. Cottard as soon as the 'Mistress' had shut the door behind her. "Dear Mme. Verdurin is not always very kind about other people's flowers," said Odette sweetly. "Whom do you go to, Odette," asked Mme. Cottard, to forestall any further criticism of the 'Mistress.' "Lemaître? I must confess, the other day in Lemaître's window I saw a huge, great pink bush which made me do something quite mad." But modesty forbade her to give any more precise details as to the price of the bush, and she said merely that the Professor, "and you know, he's not at all a quick-tempered man," had 'waved his sword in the air' and told her that she "didn't know what money meant." "No, no, I've no regular florist except Debac." "Nor have I," said Mme. Cottard, "but I confess that I am unfaithful to him now and then with Lachaume." "Oh, you forsake him for Lachaume, do you; I must tell Debac that," retorted Odette, always anxious to shew her wit, and to lead the conversation in her own house, where she felt more at her ease than in the little clan. "Besides, Lachaume is really becoming too dear; his prices are quite excessive, don't you know; I find his prices impossible!" she added, laughing.

Meanwhile Mme. Bontemps, who had been heard a hundred times to declare that nothing would induce her to go to the Verdurins', delighted at being asked to the famous Wednesdays, was planning in her own mind how she could manage to attend as many of them as possible. She was not aware that Mme. Verdurin liked people not to miss a single one; also she was one of those people whose company is but little sought, who, when a hostess invites them to a series of parties, do not accept and go to them without more ado, like those who know that it is always a pleasure to see them, whenever they have a moment to spare and feel inclined to go out; people of her type deny themselves it may be the first evening and the third, imagining that their absence will be noticed, and save themselves up for the second and fourth, unless it should happen that, having heard from a trustworthy source that the third is to be a particularly brilliant party, they reverse the original order, assuring their hostess that "most unfortunately, we had another engagement last week." So Mme. Bontemps was calculating how many Wednesdays there could still be left before Easter, and by what means she might manage to secure one extra, and yet not appear to be thrusting herself upon her hostess. She relied upon Mme. Cottard, whom she would have with her in the carriage going home, to give her a few hints. "Oh, Mme. Bontemps, I see you getting up to go; it is very bad of you to give the signal for flight like that! You owe me some compensation for not turning up last Thursday. . . . Come, sit down again, just for a minute. You can't possibly be going anywhere else before dinner. Really, you won't let yourself be tempted?" went on Mme. Swann, and, as she held out a plate of cakes, "You know, they're not at all bad, these little horrors. They don't look nice, but just taste one, I know you'll like it." "On the contrary, they look quite delicious," broke in Mme. Cottard. "In your house, Odette, one is never short of victuals. I have no need to ask to see the trade-mark; I know you get everything from Rebattet. I must say that I am more eclectic. For sweet biscuits and everything of that sort I repair, as often as not, to Bourbonneux. But I agree that they simply don't know what an ice means. Rebattet for everything iced, and syrups and sorbets; they're past masters. As my husband would say, they're the *ne plus ultra*." "Oh, but we just make these in the house. You won't, really?" "I shan't be able to eat a scrap of dinner," pleaded Mme. Bontemps, "but I will just sit down again for a moment; you know, I adore talking to a clever woman like you." "You will think me highly indiscreet, Odette, but I should so like to know what you thought of the hat Mme. Trombert had on. I know, of course, that big hats are the fashion just now. All the same, wasn't it just the least little bit exaggerated? And compared to the hat she came to see me in the other day, the one she had on just now was microscopic!" "Oh no, I am not at all clever," said Odette, thinking that this sounded well. "I am a perfect simpleton, I believe everything people say, and worry myself to death over the least thing." And she insinuated that she had, just at first, suffered terribly from the thought of having married a man like Swann, who had a separate life of his own and was unfaithful to her. Meanwhile the Prince d'Agrigente, having caught the words "I am not at all clever," thought it incumbent on him to protest; unfortunately he had not the knack of repartee. "Tut, tut, tut, tut!" cried Mme. Bontemps, "Not clever; you!" "That's just what I was saying to myself—'What do I hear?'," the Prince clutched at this straw, "My ears must have played me false!" "No, I assure you," went on Odette, "I am really just an ordinary woman, very easily shocked, full of prejudices, living in my own little groove and dreadfully ignorant." And then, in case he had any news of the Baron de Charlus, "Have you seen our dear Baronet?" she asked him. "You, ignorant!" cried Mme. Bontemps. "Then I wonder what you'd say of the official world, all those wives of Excellencies who can talk of nothing but their frocks. . . . Listen to this, my friend; not more than a week ago I happened to mention *Lohengrin* to the Education Minister's wife. She stared at me, and said '*Lohengrin?* Oh, yes, the new review at the Folies-Bergères. I hear it's a perfect scream!' What do you say to that, eh? You can't help yourself; when people say things like that it makes your blood boil. I could have struck her. Because I have a bit of a temper of my own. What do you say, sir;" she turned to me, "was I not right?" "Listen," said Mme. Cottard, "people can't help answering a little off the mark when they're asked a thing like that point blank, without any warning. I know something about it, because Mme. Verdurin also has a habit of putting a pistol to your head." "Speaking of Mme. Verdurin," Mme. Bontemps asked Mme. Cottard, "do you know who will be there on Wednesday? Oh, I've just remembered that we've accepted an invitation for next Wednesday. You wouldn't care to dine with us on Wednesday week? We could go on together to Mme. Verdurin's. I should never dare to go there by myself; I don't know why it is, that great lady always terrifies me." "I'll tell you what it is," replied Mme. Cottard, "what frightens you about Mme. Verdurin is her organ. But you see everyone can't have such a charming organ as Mme. Swann. Once you've found your tongue, as the 'Mistress' says, the ice will soon be broken. For she's a very easy person, really, to get on with. But I can quite understand what you feel; it's never pleasant to find oneself for the first time in a strange country." "Won't you dine with us, too?" said Mme. Bontemps to Mme. Swann. "After dinner we could all go to the Verdurins' together, 'do a Verdurin'; and even if it means that the 'Mistress' will stare me out of countenance and never ask me to the house again, once we are there we'll just sit by ourselves and have a quiet talk, I'm sure that's what I should like best." But this assertion can hardly have been quite truthful, for Mme. Bontemps went on to ask: "Who do you think will be there on Wednesday week? What will they be doing? There won't be too big a crowd, I hope!" "I certainly shan't be there," said Odette. "We shall just look in for a minute on the last Wednesday of all. If you don't mind waiting till then——" But Mme. Bontemps did not appear to be tempted by the proposal.

Granted that the intellectual distinction of a house and its smartness are generally in inverse rather than direct ratio, one must suppose, since Swann found Mme. Bontemps attractive, that any forfeiture of position once accepted has the consequence of making us less particular with regard to the people among whom we have resigned ourselves to finding entertainment, less particular with regard to their intelligence as to everything else about them. And if this be true, men, like nations, must see their culture and even their language disappear with their independence. One of the effects of this indulgence is to aggravate the tendency which after a certain age we have towards finding pleasure in speeches that are a homage to our own turn of mind, to our weaknesses, an encouragement to us to yield to them; that is the age at which a great artist prefers to the company of original minds that of pupils who have nothing in common with him save the letter of his doctrine, who listen to him and offer incense; at which a man or woman of mark, who is living entirely for love, will find that the most intelligent person in a gathering is one perhaps of no distinction, but one who has shewn by some utterance that he can understand and approve what is meant by an existence devoted to gallantry, and has thus pleasantly excited the voluptuous instincts of the lover or mistress; it was the age, too, at which Swann, in so far as he had become the husband of Odette, enjoyed hearing Mme. Bontemps say how silly it was to have nobody in one's house but duchesses (concluding from that, quite the contrary of what he would have decided in the old days at the Verdurins', that she was a good creature, extremely sensible and not at all a snob) and telling her stories which made her 'die laughing' because she had not heard them before, although she always 'saw the point' at once, liked flattering her for his own amusement. "Then the Doctor is not mad about flowers, like you?" Mme. Swann asked Mme. Cottard. "Oh, well, you know, my husband is a sage; he practises moderation in all things. Yet, I must admit, he has a passion." Her eye aflame with malice, joy, curiosity, "And what is that, pray?" inquired Mme. Bontemps. Quite simply Mme. Cottard answered her, "Reading." "Oh, that's a very restful passion in a husband!" cried Mme. Bontemps suppressing an impish laugh. "When the Doctor gets a book in his hands, you know!" "Well, that needn't alarm you much . . ." "But it does, for his eyesight. I must go now and look after him, Odette, and I shall come back on the very first opportunity and knock at your door. Talking of eyesight, have you heard that the new house Mme. Verdurin has just bought is to be lighted by electricity? I didn't get that from my own little secret service, you know, but from quite a different source; it was the electrician himself, Mildé, who told me. You see, I quote my authorities! Even the bedrooms, he says, are to have electric lamps with shades which will filter the light. It is evidently a charming luxury, for those who can afford it. But it seems that our contemporaries must absolutely have the newest thing if it's the only one of its kind in the world. Just fancy, the sister-in-law of a friend of mine has had the telephone installed in her house! She can order things from her tradesmen without having to go out of doors! I confess that I've made the most bare-faced stratagems to get permission to go there one day, just to speak into the instrument. It's very tempting, but more in a friend's house than at home. I don't think I should like to have the telephone in my establishment. Once the first excitement is over, it must be a perfect racket going on all the time. Now, Odette, I must be off; you're not to keep Mme. Bontemps any longer, she's looking after me. I must absolutely tear myself away; you're making me behave in a nice way, I shall be getting home after my husband!"

And for myself also it was time to return home, before I had tasted those wintry delights of which the chrysanthemums had seemed to me to be the brilliant envelope. These pleasures had not appeared, and yet Mme. Swann did not look as though she expected anything more. She allowed the servants to carry away the tea-things, as who should say "Time, please, gentlemen!" And at last she did say to me: "Really, must you go? Very well; good-bye!" I felt that I might have stayed there without encountering those unknown pleasures, and that my unhappiness was not the cause of my having to forego them. Were they to be found, then, situated not upon that beaten track of hours which leads one always to the moment of departure, but rather upon some cross-road unknown to me along which I ought to have digressed? At least, the object of my visit had been attained; Gilberte would know that I had come to see her parents when she was not at home, and that I had, as Mme. Cottard had incessantly assured me, "made a complete conquest, first shot, of Mme. Verdurin," whom, she added, she had never seen 'make so much' of anyone. ("You and she must have hooked atoms.") She would know that I had spoken of her as was fitting, with affection, but that I had not that incapacity for living without our seeing one another which I believed to be at the root of the boredom that she had shewn at our last meetings. I had told Mme. Swann that I should not be able to see Gilberte again. I had said this as though I had finally decided not to see her any more. And the letter which I was going to send Gilberte would be framed on those lines. Only to myself, to fortify my courage, I proposed no more than a supreme and concentrated effort, lasting a few days only. I said to myself: "This is the last time that I shall refuse to meet her; I shall accept the next invitation." To make our separation less difficult to realise, I did not picture it to myself as final. But I knew very well that it would be.

The first of January was exceptionally painful to me that winter. So, no doubt, is everything that marks a date and an anniversary when we are unhappy. But if our unhappiness is due to the loss of some dear friend, our suffering consists merely in an unusually vivid comparison of the present with the past. There was added to this, in my case, the unexpressed hope that Gilberte, having intended to leave me to take the first steps towards a reconciliation, and discovering that I had not taken them, had been waiting only for the excuse of New Year's Day to write to me, saying: "What is the matter? I am madly in love with you; come, and let us explain things properly; I cannot live without seeing you." As the last days of the old year went by, such a letter began to seem probable. It was, perhaps, nothing of the sort, but to make us believe that such a thing is probable the desire, the need that we have for it suffices. The soldier is convinced that a certain interval of time, capable of being indefinitely prolonged, will be allowed him before the bullet finds him, the thief before he is taken, men in general before they have to die. That is the amulet which preserves people—and sometimes peoples—not from danger but from the fear of danger, in reality from the belief in danger, which in certain cases allows them to brave it without their actually needing to be brave. It is confidence of this sort, and with as little foundation, that sustains the lover who is counting upon a reconciliation, upon a letter. For me to cease to expect a letter it would have sufficed that I should have ceased to wish for one. However unimportant one may know that one is in the eyes of her whom one still loves, one attributes to her a series of thoughts (though their sum-total be indifference) the intention to express those thoughts, a complication of her inner life in which one is the constant object possibly of her antipathy but certainly of her attention. But to imagine what was going on in Gilberte's mind I should have required simply the power to anticipate on that New Year's Day what I should feel on the first day of any of the years to come, when the attention or the silence or the affection or the coldness of Gilberte would pass almost unnoticed by me and I should not dream, should not even be able to dream of seeking a solution of problems which would have ceased to perplex me. When we are in love, our love is too big a thing for us to be able altogether to contain it within us. It radiates towards the beloved object, finds in her a surface which arrests it, forcing it to return to its starting-point, and it is this shock of the repercussion of our own affection which we call the other's regard for ourselves, and which pleases us more then than on its outward journey because we do not recognise it as having originated in ourselves. New Year's Day rang out all its hours without there coming to me that letter from Gilberte. And as I received a few others containing greetings tardy or retarded by the overburdening of the mails at that season, on the third and fourth of January I hoped still, but my hope grew hourly more faint. Upon the days that followed I gazed through a mist of tears. This undoubtedly meant that, having been less sincere than I thought in my renunciation of Gilberte, I had kept the hope of a letter from her for the New Year. And seeing that hope exhausted before I had had time to shelter myself behind another, I suffered as would an invalid who had emptied his phial of morphia without having another within his reach. But perhaps also in my case—and these two explanations are not mutually exclusive, for a single feeling is often made up of contrary elements—the hope that I entertained of ultimately receiving a letter had brought to my mind's eye once again the image of Gilberte, had reawakened the emotions which the expectation of finding myself in her presence, the sight of her, her way of treating me had aroused in me before. The immediate possibility of a reconciliation had suppressed in me that faculty the immense importance of which we are apt to overlook: the faculty of resignation. Neurasthenics find it impossible to believe the friends who assure them that they will gradually recover their peace of mind if they will stay in bed and receive no letters, read no newspapers. They imagine that such a course will only exasperate their twitching nerves. And similarly lovers, who look upon it from their enclosure in a contrary state of mind, who have not begun yet to make trial of it, are unable to believe in the healing power of renunciation.

In consequence of the violence of my palpitations, my doses of caffeine were reduced; the palpitations ceased. Whereupon I asked myself whether it was not to some extent the drug that had been responsible for the anguish that I had felt when I came near to quarrelling with Gilberte, an anguish which I had attributed, on every recurrence of it, to the distressing prospect of never seeing my friend again or of running the risk of seeing her only when she was a prey to the same ill-humour. But if this medicine had been at the root of the sufferings which my imagination must in that case have interpreted wrongly (not that there would be anything extraordinary in that, seeing that, among lovers, the most acute mental suffering assumes often the physical identity of the woman with whom they are living), it had been, in that sense, like the philtre which, long after they have drunk of it, continues to bind Tristan to Isolde. For the physical improvement which the reduction of my caffeine effected almost at once did not arrest the evolution of that grief which my absorption of the toxin had perhaps—if it had not created it—at any rate contrived to render more acute.

Only, as the middle of the month of January approached, once my hopes of a letter on New Year's Day had been disappointed, once the additional disturbance that had come with their disappointment had grown calm, it was my old sorrow, that of 'before the holidays,' which began again. What was perhaps the most cruel thing about it was that I myself was its architect, unconscious, wilful, merciless and patient. The one thing that mattered, my relations with Gilberte, it was I who was labouring to make them impossible by gradually creating out of this prolonged separation from my friend, not indeed her indifference, but what would come to the same thing in the end, my own. It was to a slow and painful suicide of that part of me which was Gilberte's lover that I was goading myself with untiring energy, with a clear sense not only of what I was presently doing but of what must result from it in the future; I knew not only that after a certain time I should cease to love Gilberte, but also that she herself would regret it and that the attempts which she would then make to see me would be as vain as those that she was making now, no longer because I loved her too well but because I should certainly be in love with some other woman whom I should continue to desire, to wait for, through hours of which I should not dare to divert any particle of a second to Gilberte who would be nothing to me then. And no doubt at that very moment in which (since I was determined not to see her again, unless after a formal request for an explanation or a full confession of love on her part, neither of which was in the least degree likely to come to me now) I had already lost Gilberte, and loved her more than ever, and could feel all that she was to me better than in the previous year when, spending all my afternoons in her company, or as many as I chose, I believed that no peril threatened our friendship,—no doubt at that moment the idea that I should one day entertain identical feelings for another was odious to me, for that idea carried me away beyond the range of Gilberte, my love and my sufferings. My love, my sufferings in which through my tears I attempted to discern precisely what Gilberte was, and was obliged to recognise that they did not pertain exclusively to her but would, sooner or later, be some other woman's portion. So that—or such, at least, was my way of thinking then—we are always detached from our fellow-creatures; when a man loves one of them he feels that his love is not labelled with their two names, but may be born again in the future, may have been born already in the past for another and not for her. And in the time when he is not in love, if he makes up his mind philosophically as to what it is that is inconsistent in love, he will find that the love of which he can speak unmoved he did not, at the moment of speaking, feel, and therefore did not know, knowledge in these matters being intermittent and not outlasting the actual presence of the sentiment. That future in which I should not love Gilberte, which my sufferings helped me to divine although my imagination was not yet able to form a clear picture of it, certainly there would still have been time to warn Gilberte that it was gradually taking shape, that its coming was, if not imminent, at least inevitable, if she herself, Gilberte, did not come to my rescue and destroy in the germ my nascent indifference. How often was I not on the point of writing, or of going to Gilberte to tell her: "Take care. My mind is made up. What I am doing now is my supreme effort. I am seeing you now for the last time. Very soon I shall have ceased to love you." But to what end? By what authority should I have reproached Gilberte for an indifference which, not that I considered myself guilty on that count, I too manifested towards everything that was not herself? The last time! To me, that appeared as something of immense significance, because I was in love with Gilberte. On her it would doubtless have made just as much impression as those letters in which our friends ask whether they may pay us a visit before they finally leave the country, an offer which, like those made by tiresome women who are in love with us, we decline because we have pleasures of our own in prospect. The time which we have at our disposal every day is elastic; the passions that we feel expand it, those that we inspire contract it; and habit fills up what remains.

Besides, what good would it have done if I had spoken to Gilberte; she would not have understood me. We imagine always when we speak that it is our own ears, our own mind that are listening. My words would have come to her only in a distorted form, as though they had had to pass through the moving curtain of a waterfall before they reached my friend, unrecognisable, giving a foolish sound, having no longer any kind of meaning. The truth which one puts into one's words does not make a direct path for itself, is not supported by irresistible evidence. A considerable time must elapse before a truth of the same order can take shape in the words themselves. Then the political opponent who, despite all argument, every proof that he has advanced to damn the votary of the rival doctrine as a traitor, will himself have come to share the hated conviction by which he who once sought in vain to disseminate it is no longer bound. Then the masterpiece of literature which for the admirers who read it aloud seemed to make self-evident the proofs of its excellence, while to those who listened it presented only a senseless or commonplace image, will by these too be proclaimed a masterpiece, but too late for the author to learn of their discovery. Similarly in love the barriers, do what one may, cannot be broken down from without by him whom they maddeningly exclude; it is when he is no longer concerned with them that suddenly, as the result of an effort directed from elsewhere, accomplished within the heart of her who did not love him, those barriers which he has charged without success will fall to no advantage. If I had come to Gilberte to tell her of my future indifference and the means of preventing it, she would have assumed from my action that my love for her, the need that I had of her, were even greater than I had supposed, and her distaste for the sight of me would thereby have been increased. And incidentally it is quite true that it was that love for her which helped me, by means of the incongruous states of mind which it successively produced in me, to foresee, more clearly than she herself could, the end of that love. And yet some such warning I might perhaps have addressed, by letter or with my own lips, to Gilberte, after a long enough interval, which would render her, it is true, less indispensable to me, but would also have proved to her that she was not so indispensable. Unfortunately certain persons—of good or evil intent—spoke of me to her in a fashion which must have led her to think that they were doing so at my request. Whenever I thus learned that Cottard, my own mother, even M. de Norpois had by a few ill-chosen words rendered useless all the sacrifice that I had just been making, wasted all the advantage of my reserve by giving me, wrongly, the appearance of having emerged from it, I was doubly angry. In the first place I could no longer reckon from any date but the present my laborious and fruitful abstention which these tiresome people had, unknown to me, interrupted and so brought to nothing. And not only that; I should have less pleasure in seeing Gilberte, who would think of me now no longer as containing myself in dignified resignation, but as plotting in the dark for an interview which she had scorned to grant me. I cursed all the idle chatter of people who so often, without any intention of hurting us or of doing us a service, for no reason, for talking's sake, often because we ourselves have not been able to refrain from talking in their presence, and because they are indiscreet (as we ourselves are), do us, at a crucial moment, so much harm. It is true that in the grim operation performed for the eradication of our love they are far from playing a part equal to that played by two persons who are in the habit, from excess of good nature in one and of malice in the other, of undoing everything at the moment when everything is on the point of being settled. But against these two persons we bear no such grudge as against the inopportune Cottards of this world, for the latter of them is the person whom we love and the former is ourself.

Meanwhile, since on almost every occasion of my going to see her Mme. Swann would invite me to come to tea another day, with her daughter, and tell me to reply directly to her, I was constantly writing to Gilberte, and in this correspondence I did not choose the expressions which might, I felt, have won her over, sought only to carve out the easiest channel for the torrent of my tears. For, like desire, regret seeks not to be analysed but to be satisfied. When one begins to love, one spends one's time, not in getting to know what one's love really is, but in making it possible to meet next day. When one abandons love one seeks not to know one's grief but to offer to her who is causing it that expression of it which seems to one the most moving. One says the things which one feels the need of saying, and which the other will not understand, one speaks for oneself alone. I wrote: "I had thought that it would not be possible. Alas, I see now that it is not so difficult." I said also: "I shall probably not see you again;" I said it while I continued to avoid shewing a coldness which she might think affected, and the words, as I wrote them, made me weep because I felt that they expressed not what I should have liked to believe but what was probably going to happen. For at the next request for a meeting which she would convey to me I should have again, as I had now, the courage not to yield, and, what with one refusal and another, I should gradually come to the moment when, by virtue of not having seen her again, I should not wish to see her. I wept, but I found courage enough to sacrifice, I tasted the sweets of sacrificing the happiness of being with her to the probability of seeming attractive to her one day, a day when, alas, my seeming attractive to her would be immaterial to me. Even the supposition, albeit so far from likely, that at this moment, as she had pretended during the last visit that I had paid her, she loved me, that what I took for the boredom which one feels in the company of a person of whom one has grown tired had been due only to a jealous susceptibility, to a feint of indifference analogous to my own, only rendered my decision less painful. It seemed to me that in years to come, when we had forgotten one another, when I should be able to look back and tell her that this letter which I was now in course of writing had not been for one moment sincere, she would answer, "What, you really did love me, did you? If you had only known how I waited for that letter, how I hoped that you were coming to see me, how I cried when I read it." The thought, while I was writing it, immediately on my return from her mother's house, that I was perhaps helping to bring about that very misunderstanding, that thought, by the sadness in which it plunged me, by the pleasure of imagining that I was loved by Gilberte, gave me the impulse to continue my letter.

If, at the moment of leaving Mme. Swann, when her tea-party ended, I was thinking of what I was going to write to her daughter, Mme. Cottard, as she departed, had been filled with thoughts of a wholly different order. On her little 'tour of inspection' she had not failed to congratulate Mme. Swann on the new 'pieces,' the recent 'acquisitions' which caught the eye in her drawing-room. She could see among them some, though only a very few, of the things that Odette had had in the old days in the Rue La Pérouse, for instance her animals carved in precious stones, her fetishes.

For since Mme. Swann had picked up from a friend whose opinion she valued the word 'dowdy'—which had opened to her a new horizon because it denoted precisely those things which a few years earlier she had considered 'smart'—all those things had, one after another, followed into retirement the gilded trellis that had served as background to her chrysanthemums, innumerable boxes of sweets from Giroux's, and the coroneted note-paper (not to mention the coins of gilt pasteboard littered about on the mantelpieces, which, even before she had come to know Swann, a man of taste had advised her to sacrifice). Moreover in the artistic disorder, the studio-like confusion of the rooms, whose walls were still painted in sombre colours which made them as different as possible from the white-enamelled drawing-rooms in which, a little later, you were to find Mme. Swann installed, the Far East recoiled more and more before the invading forces of the eighteenth century; and the cushions which, to make me 'comfortable,' Mme. Swann heaped up and buffeted into position behind my back were sprinkled with Louis XV garlands and not, as of old, with Chinese dragons. In the room in which she was usually to be found, and of which she would say, "Yes, I like this room; I use it a great deal. I couldn't live with a lot of horrid vulgar things swearing at me all the time; this is where I do my work——" though she never stated precisely at what she was working. Was it a picture? A book, perhaps, for the hobby of writing was beginning to become common among women who liked to 'do something,' not to be quite useless. She was surrounded by Dresden pieces (having a fancy for that sort of porcelain, which she would name with an English accent, saying in any connexion: "How pretty that is; it reminds me of Dresden flowers,"), and dreaded for them even more than in the old days for her grotesque figures and her flower-pots the ignorant handling of her servants who must expiate, every now and then, the anxiety that they had caused her by submitting to outbursts of rage at which Swann, the most courteous and considerate of masters, looked on without being shocked. Not that the clear perception of certain weaknesses in those whom we love in any way diminishes our affection for them; rather that affection makes us find those weaknesses charming. Rarely nowadays was it in one of those Japanese wrappers that Odette received her familiars, but rather in the bright and billowing silk of a Watteau gown whose flowering foam she made as though to caress where it covered her bosom, and in which she immersed herself, looked solemn, splashed and sported, with such an air of comfort, of a cool skin and long-drawn breath, that she seemed to look on these garments not as something decorative, a mere setting for herself, but as necessary, in the same way as her 'tub' or her daily 'outing,' to satisfy the requirements of her style of beauty and the niceties of hygiene. She used often to say that she would go without bread rather than give up 'art' and 'having nice things about her,' and that the burning of the 'Gioconda' would distress her infinitely more than the destruction, by the same element, of 'millions' of the people she knew. Theories which seemed paradoxical to her friends, but made her pass among them as a superior woman, and qualified her to receive a visit once a week from the Belgian Minister, so that in the little world whose sun she was everyone would have been greatly astonished to learn that elsewhere—at the Verdurins', for instance—she was reckoned a fool. It was this vivacity of expression that made Mme. Swann prefer men's society to women's. But when she criticised the latter it was always from the courtesan's standpoint, singling out the blemishes that might lower them in the esteem of men, a lumpy figure, a bad complexion, inability to spell, hairy legs, foul breath, pencilled eyebrows. But towards a woman who had shewn her kindness or indulgence in the past she was more lenient, especially if this woman were now in trouble. She would defend her warmly, saying: "People are not fair to her. I assure you, she's quite a nice woman really."

It was not only the furniture of Odette's drawing-room, it was Odette herself that Mme. Cottard and all those who had frequented the society of Mme. de Crécy would have found it difficult, if they had not seen her for some little time, to recognise. She seemed to be so much younger. No doubt this was partly because she had grown stouter, was in better condition, seemed at once calmer, more cool, more restful, and also because the new way in which she braided her hair gave more breadth to a face which was animated by an application of pink powder, and into which her eyes and profile, formerly too prominent, seemed now to have been reabsorbed. But another reason for this change lay in the fact that, having reached the turning-point of life, Odette had at length discovered, or invented, a physiognomy of her own, an unalterable 'character,' a 'style of beauty,' and on her incoherent features—which for so long, exposed to every hazard, every weakness of the flesh, borrowing for a moment, at the slightest fatigue, from the years to come, a sort of flickering shadow of anility, had furnished her, well or ill, according to how she was feeling, how she was looking, with a countenance dishevelled, inconstant, formless and attractive—had now set this fixed type, as it were an immortal youthfulness.

Swann had in his room, instead of the handsome photographs that were now taken of his wife, in all of which the same cryptic, victorious expression enabled one to recognise, in whatever dress and hat, her triumphant face and figure, a little old daguerreotype of her, quite plain, taken long before the appearance of this new type, so that the youth and beauty of Odette, which she had not yet discovered when it was taken, appeared to be missing from it. But it is probable that Swann, having remained constant, or having reverted to a different conception of her, enjoyed in the slender young woman with pensive eyes and tired features, caught in a pose between rest and motion, a more Botticellian charm. For he still liked to recognise in his wife one of Botticelli's figures. Odette, who on the other hand sought not to bring out but to make up for, to cover and conceal the points in herself that did not please her, what might perhaps to an artist express her 'character' but in her woman's eyes were merely blemishes, would not have that painter mentioned in her presence. Swann had a wonderful scarf of oriental silk, blue and pink, which he had bought because it was exactly that worn by Our Lady in the *Magnificat*. But Mme. Swann refused to wear it. Once only she allowed her husband to order her a dress covered all over with daisies, cornflowers, forget-me-nots and campanulas, like that of the Primavera. And sometimes in the evening, when she was tired, he would quietly draw my attention to the way in which she was giving, quite unconsciously, to her pensive hands the uncontrolled, almost distraught movement of the Virgin who dips her pen into the inkpot that the angel holds out to her, before writing upon the sacred page on which is already traced the word '*Magnificat*.' But he added, "Whatever you do, don't say anything about it to her; if she knew she was doing it, she would change her pose at once."

Save at these moments of involuntary relaxation, in which Swann essayed to recapture the melancholy cadence of Botticelli, Odette seemed now to be cut out in a single figure, wholly confined within a line which, following the contours of the woman, had abandoned the winding paths, the capricious re-entrants and salients, the radial points, the elaborate dispersions of the fashions of former days, but also, where it was her anatomy that went wrong by making unnecessary digressions within or without the ideal circumference traced for it, was able to rectify, by a bold stroke, the errors of nature, to make up, along a whole section of its course, for the failure as well of the human as of the textile element. The pads, the preposterous 'bustle' had disappeared, as well as those tailed corsets which, projecting under the skirt and stiffened by rods of whalebone, had so long amplified Odette with an artificial stomach and had given her the appearance of being composed of several incongruous pieces which there was no individuality to bind together. The vertical fall of fringes, the curve of trimmings had made way for the inflexion of a body which made silk palpitate as a siren stirs the waves, gave to cambric a human expression now that it had been liberated, like a creature that had taken shape and drawn breath, from the long chaos and nebulous envelopment of fashions at length dethroned. But Mme. Swann had chosen, had contrived to preserve some vestiges of certain of these, in the very thick of the more recent fashions that had supplanted them. When in the evening, finding myself unable to work and feeling certain that Gilberte had gone to the theatre with friends, I paid a surprise visit to her parents, I used often to find Mme. Swann in an elegant dishabille the skirt of which, of one of those rich dark colours, blood-red or orange, which seemed always as though they meant something very special, because they were no longer the fashion, was crossed diagonally, though not concealed, by a broad band of black lace which recalled the flounces of an earlier day. When on a still chilly afternoon in Spring she had taken me (before my rupture with her daughter) to the Jardin d'Acclimatation, under her coat, which she opened or buttoned up according as the exercise made her feel warm, the dog-toothed border of her blouse suggested a glimpse of the lapel of some non-existent waistcoat such as she had been accustomed to wear, some years earlier, when she had liked their edges to have the same slight indentations; and her scarf—of that same 'Scotch tartan' to which she had remained faithful, but whose tones she had so far softened, red becoming pink and blue lilac, that one might almost have taken it for one of those pigeon's-breast taffetas which were the latest novelty—was knotted in such a way under her chin, without one's being able to make out where it was fastened, that one could not help being reminded of those bonnet-strings which were now no longer worn. She need only 'hold out' like this for a little longer and young men attempting to understand her theory of dress would say: "Mme. Swann is quite a period in herself, isn't she?" As in a fine literary style which overlays with its different forms and so strengthens a tradition which lies concealed among them, so in Mme. Swann's attire those half-hinted memories of waistcoats or of ringlets, sometimes a tendency, at once repressed, towards the 'all aboard,' or even a distant and vague allusion to the 'chase me' kept alive beneath the concrete form the unfinished likeness of other, older forms which you would not have succeeded, now, in making a tailor or a dressmaker reproduce, but about which your thoughts incessantly hovered, and enwrapped Mme. Swann in a cloak of nobility—perhaps because the sheer uselessness of these fripperies made them seem meant to serve some more than utilitarian purpose, perhaps because of the traces they preserved of vanished years, or else because there was a sort of personality permeating this lady's wardrobe, which gave to the most dissimilar of her costumes a distinct family likeness. One felt that she did not dress simply for the comfort or the adornment of her body; she was surrounded by her garments as by the delicate and spiritualised machinery of a whole form of civilisation.

When Gilberte, who, as a rule, gave her tea-parties on the days when her mother was 'at home,' had for some reason to go out, and I was therefore free to attend Mme. Swann's 'kettledrum,' I would find her dressed in one of her lovely gowns, some of which were of taffeta, others of grosgrain, or of velvet, or of *crêpe-de-Chine,* or satin or silk, gowns which, not being loose like those that she generally wore in the house but buttoned up tight as though she were just going out in them, gave to her stay-at-home laziness on those afternoons something alert and energetic. And no doubt the daring simplicity of their cut was singularly appropriate to her figure and to her movements, which her sleeves appeared to be symbolising in colours that varied from day to day: one would have said that there was a sudden determination in the blue velvet, an easy-going good humour in the white taffeta, and that a sort of supreme discretion full of dignity in her way of holding out her arm had, in order to become visible, put on the appearance, dazzling with the smile of one who had made great sacrifices, of the black *crêpe-de-Chine.* But at the same time these animated gowns took from the complication of their trimmings, none of which had any practical value or served any conceivable purpose, something detached, pensive, secret, in harmony with the melancholy which Mme. Swann never failed to shew, at least in the shadows under her eyes and the drooping arches of her hands. Beneath the profusion of sapphire charms, enamelled four-leaf clovers, silver medals, gold medallions, turquoise amulets, ruby chains and topaz chestnuts there would be, on the dress itself, some design carried out in colour which pursued across the surface of an inserted panel a preconceived existence of its own, some row of little satin buttons, which buttoned nothing and could not be unbuttoned, a strip of braid that sought to please the eye with the minuteness, the discretion of a delicate reminder; and these, as well as the trinkets, had the effect—for otherwise there would have been no possible justification of their presence—of disclosing a secret intention, being a pledge of affection, keeping a secret, ministering to a superstition, commemorating a recovery from sickness, a granted wish, a love affair or a 'philippine.' And now and then in the blue velvet of the bodice a hint of 'slashes,' in the Henri II style, in the gown of black satin a slight swelling which, if it was in the sleeves, just below the shoulders, made one think of the 'leg of mutton' sleeves of 1830, or if, on the other hand, it was beneath the skirt, with its

Louis XV paniers, gave the dress a just perceptible air of being 'fancy dress' and at all events, by insinuating beneath the life of the present day a vague reminiscence of the past, blended with the person of Mme. Swann the charm of certain heroines of history or romance. And if I were to draw her attention to this: "I don't play golf," she would answer, "like so many of my friends. So I should have no excuse for going about, as they do, in sweaters."

In the confusion of her drawing-room, on her way from shewing out one visitor, or with a plateful of cakes to 'tempt' another, Mme. Swann as she passed by me would take me aside for a moment: "I have special instructions from Gilberte that you are to come to luncheon the day after to-morrow. As I wasn't sure of seeing you here, I was going to write to you if you hadn't come." I continued to resist. And this resistance was costing me steadily less and less, because, however much one may love the poison that is destroying one, when one has compulsorily to do without it, and has had to do without it for some time past, one cannot help attaching a certain value to the peace of mind which one had ceased to know, to the absence of emotion and suffering. If one is not altogether sincere in assuring oneself that one does not wish ever to see again her whom one loves, one would not be a whit more sincere in saying that one would like to see her. For no doubt one can endure her absence only when one promises oneself that it shall not be for long, and thinks of the day on which one shall see her again, but at the same time one feels how much less painful are those daily recurring dreams of a meeting immediate and incessantly postponed than would be an interview which might be followed by a spasm of jealousy, with the result that the news that one is shortly to see her whom one loves would cause a disturbance which would be none too pleasant. What one procrastinates now from day to day is no longer the end of the intolerable anxiety caused by separation, it is the dreaded renewal of emotions which can lead to nothing. How infinitely one prefers to any such interview the docile memory which one can supplement at one's pleasure with dreams, in which she who in reality does not love one seems, far from that, to be making protestations of her love for one, when one is by oneself; that memory which one can contrive, by blending gradually with it a portion of what one desires, to render as pleasing as one may choose, how infinitely one prefers it to the avoided interview in which one would have to deal with a creature to whom one could no longer dictate at one's pleasure the words that one would like to hear on her lips, but from whom one would meet with fresh coldness, unlooked-for violence. We know, all of us, when we no longer love, that forgetfulness, that even a vague memory do not cause us so much suffering as an ill-starred love. It was of such forgetfulness that in anticipation I preferred, without acknowledging it to myself, the reposeful tranquillity.

Moreover, whatever discomfort there may be in such a course of psychical detachment and isolation grows steadily less for another reason, namely that it weakens while it is in process of healing that fixed obsession which is a state of love. Mine was still strong enough for me to be able to count upon recapturing my old position in Gilberte's estimation, which in view of my deliberate abstention must, it seemed to me, be steadily increasing; in other words each of those calm and melancholy days on which I did not see her, coming one after the other without interruption, continuing too without prescription (unless some busy-body were to meddle in my affairs), was a day not lost but gained. Gained to no purpose, it might be, for presently they would be able to pronounce that I was healed. Resignation, modulating our habits, allows certain elements of our strength to be indefinitely increased. Those—so wretchedly inadequate—that I had had to support my grief, on the first evening of my rupture with Gilberte, had since multiplied to an incalculable power. Only, the tendency which everything that exists has to prolong its own existence is sometimes interrupted by sudden impulses to which we give way with all the fewer scruples over letting ourselves go since we know for how many days, for how many months even we have been able, and might still be able to abstain. And often it is when the purse in which we hoard our savings is nearly full that we undo and empty it, it is without waiting for the result of our medical treatment and when we have succeeded in growing accustomed to it that we abandon it. So, one day, when Mme. Swann was repeating her familiar statement of what a pleasure it would be to Gilberte to see me, thus putting the happiness of which I had now for so long been depriving myself, as it were within arm's length, I was stupefied by the realisation that it was still possible for me to enjoy that pleasure, and I could hardly wait until next day, when I had made up my mind to take Gilberte by surprise, in the evening, before dinner.

What helped me to remain patient throughout the long day that followed was another plan that I had made. From the moment in which everything was forgotten, in which I was reconciled to Gilberte, I no longer wished to visit her save as a lover. Every day she should receive from me the finest flowers that grew. And if Mme. Swann, albeit she had no right to be too severe a mother, should forbid my making a daily offering of flowers, I should find other gifts, more precious and less frequent. My parents did not give me enough money for me to be able to buy expensive things. I thought of a big bowl of old Chinese porcelain which had been left to me by aunt Léonie, and of which Mamma prophesied daily that Françoise would come running to her with an "Oh, it's all come to pieces!" and that that would be the end of it. Would it not be wiser, in that case, to part with it, to sell it so as to be able to give Gilberte all the pleasure I could. I felt sure that I could easily get a thousand francs for it. I had it tied up in paper; I had grown so used to it that I had ceased altogether to notice it; parting with it had at least the advantage of making me realise what it was like. I took it with me as I started for the Swanns', and, giving the driver their address, told him to go by the Champs-Elysées, at one end of which was the shop of a big dealer in oriental things, who knew my father. Greatly to my surprise he offered me there and then not one thousand but ten thousand francs for the bowl. I took the notes with rapture. Every day, for a whole year, I could smother Gilberte in roses and lilac. When I left the shop and got into my cab again the driver (naturally enough, since the Swanns lived out by the Bois) instead of taking the ordinary way began to drive me along the Avenue des Champs-Elysées. He had just passed the end of the Rue de Berri when, in the failing light, I thought I saw, close to the Swanns' house but going in the other direction, going away from it, Gilberte, who was walking slowly, though with a firm step, by the side of a young man with whom she was conversing, but whose face I could not distinguish. I stood up in the cab, meaning to tell the driver to stop; then hesitated. The strolling couple were already some way away, and the parallel lines which their leisurely progress was quietly drawing were on the verge of disappearing in the Elysian gloom. A moment later, I had reached Gilberte's door. I was received by Mme. Swann. "Oh! she will be sorry!" was my greeting, "I can't think why she isn't in. She came home just now from a lesson, complaining of the heat, and said she was going out for a little fresh air with another girl." "I fancy I passed her in the Avenue des Champs-Elysées." "Oh, I don't think it can have been. Anyhow, don't mention it to her father; he doesn't approve of her going out at this time of night. Must you go? Good-bye." I left her, told my driver to go home the same way, but found no trace of the two walking figures. Where had they been? What were they saying to one another in the darkness so confidentially?

I returned home, desperately clutching my windfall of ten thousand francs, which would have enabled me to arrange so many pleasant surprises for that Gilberte whom now I had made up my mind never to see again. No doubt my call at the dealer's had brought me happiness by allowing me to expect that in future, whenever I saw my friend, she would be pleased with me and grateful. But if I had not called there, if my cabman had not taken the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, I should not have seen Gilberte with that young man. Thus a single action may have two contradictory effects, and the misfortune that it engenders cancel the good fortune that it has already brought one. There had befallen me the opposite of what so frequently happens. We desire some pleasure, and the material means of obtaining it are lacking. "It is a mistake," Labruyère tells us, "to be in love without an ample fortune." There is nothing for it but to attempt a gradual elimination of our desire for that pleasure. In my case, however, the material means had been forthcoming, but at the same moment, if not by a logical effect, at any rate as a fortuitous consequence of that initial success, my pleasure had been snatched from me. As, for that matter, it seems as though it must always be. As a rule, however, not on the same evening on which we have acquired what makes it possible. Usually, we continue to struggle and to hope for a little longer. But the pleasure can never be realised. If we succeed in overcoming the force of circumstances, nature at once shifts the battle-ground, placing it within ourselves, and effects a gradual change in our heart until it desires something other than what it is going to obtain. And if this transposition has been so rapid that our heart has not had time to change, nature does not, on that account, despair of conquering us, in a manner more gradual, it is true, more subtle, but no less efficacious. It is then, at the last moment, that the possession of our happiness is wrested from us, or rather it is that very possession which nature, with diabolical cleverness, uses to destroy our happiness. After failure in every quarter of the domain of life and action, it is a final incapacity, the mental incapacity for happiness, that nature creates in us. The phenomenon of happiness either fails to appear, or at once gives way to the bitterest of reactions.

I put my ten thousand francs in a drawer. But they were no longer of any use to me. I ran through them, as it happened, even sooner than if I had sent flowers every day to Gilberte, for when evening came I was always too wretched to stay in the house and used to go and pour out my sorrows upon the bosoms of women whom I did not love. As for seeking to give any sort of pleasure to Gilberte, I no longer thought of that; to visit her house again now could only have added to my sufferings. Even the sight of Gilberte, which would have been so exquisite a pleasure only yesterday, would no longer have sufficed me. For I should have been miserable all the time that I was not actually with her. That is how a woman, by every fresh torture that she inflicts on us, increases, often quite unconsciously, her power over us and at the same time our demands upon her. With each injury that she does us, she encircles us more and more completely, doubles our chains—but halves the strength of those which hitherto we had thought adequate to bind her in order that we might retain our own peace of mind. Only yesterday, had I not been afraid of annoying Gilberte, I should have been content to ask for no more than occasional meetings, which now would no longer have contented me and for which I should now have substituted quite different terms. For in this respect love is not like war; after the battle is ended we renew the fight with keener ardour, which we never cease to intensify the more thoroughly we are defeated, provided always that we are still in a position to give battle. This was not my position with regard to Gilberte. Also I preferred, at first, not to see her mother again. I continued, it is true, to assure myself that Gilberte did not love me, that I had known this for ever so long, that I could see her again if I chose, and, if I did not choose, forget her in course of time. But these ideas, like a remedy which has no effect upon certain complaints, had no power whatsoever to obliterate those two parallel lines which I kept on seeing, traced by Gilberte and the young man as they slowly disappeared along the Avenue des Champs-Elysées. This was a fresh misfortune, which like the rest would gradually lose its force, a fresh image which would one day present itself to my mind's eye completely purged of every noxious element that it now contained, like those deadly poisons which one can handle without danger, or like a crumb of dynamite which one can use to light one's cigarette without fear of an explosion. Meanwhile there was in me another force which was striving with all its might to overpower that unwholesome force which still shewed me, without alteration, the figure of Gilberte walking in the dusk: to meet and to break the shock of the renewed assaults of memory, I had, toiling effectively on the other side, imagination. The former force did indeed continue to shew me that couple walking in the Champs-Elysées, and offered me other disagreeable pictures drawn from the past, as for instance Gilberte shrugging her shoulders when her mother asked her to stay and entertain me. But the other force, working upon the canvas of my hopes, outlined a future far more attractively developed than this poor past which, after all, was so restricted. For one minute in which I saw Gilberte's sullen face, how many were there in which I planned to my own satisfaction all the steps that she was to take towards our reconciliation, perhaps even towards our betrothal. It is true that this force, which my imagination was concentrating upon the future, it was drawing, for all that, from the past. I was still in love with her whom, it is true, I believed that I detested. But whenever anyone told me that I was looking well, or was nicely dressed, I wished that she could have been there to see me. I was irritated by the desire that many people shewed about this time to ask me to their houses, and refused all their invitations. There was a scene at home because I did not accompany my father to an official dinner at which the Bontemps were to be present with their niece Albertine, a young girl still hardly more than a child. So it is that the different periods of our life overlap one another. We scornfully decline, because of one whom we love and who will some day be of so little account, to see another who is of no account to-day, with whom we shall be in love to-morrow, with whom we might, perhaps, had we consented to see her now, have fallen in love a little earlier and who would thus have put a term to our present sufferings, bringing others, it is true, in their place. Mine were steadily growing less. I had the surprise of discovering in my own heart one sentiment one day, another the next, generally inspired by some hope or some fear relative to Gilberte. To the Gilberte whom I kept within me. I ought to have reminded myself that the other, the real Gilberte, was perhaps entirely different from mine, knew nothing of the regrets that I ascribed to her, was thinking probably less about me, not merely than I was thinking about her but that I made her be thinking about me when I was closeted alone with my fictitious Gilberte, wondering what really were her feelings with regard to me and so imagining her attention as constantly directed towards myself.

During those periods in which our bitterness of spirit, though steadily diminishing, still persists, a distinction must be drawn between the bitterness which comes to us from our constantly thinking of the person herself and that which is revived by certain memories, some cutting speech, some word in a letter that we have had from her. The various forms which that bitterness can assume we shall examine when we come to deal with another and later love affair; for the present it must suffice to say that, of these two kinds, the former is infinitely the less cruel. That is because our conception of the person, since it dwells always within ourselves, is there adorned with the halo with which we are bound before long to invest her, and bears the marks if not of the frequent solace of hope, at any rate of the tranquillity of a permanent sorrow. (It must also be observed that the image of a person who makes us suffer counts for little if anything in those complications which aggravate the unhappiness of love, prolong it and prevent our recovery, just as in certain maladies the cause is insignificant beyond comparison with the fever which follows it and the time that must elapse before our convalescence.) But if the idea of the person whom we love catches and reflects a ray of light from a mind which is on the whole optimistic, it is not so with those special memories, those cutting words, that inimical letter (I received only one that could be so described from Gilberte); you would say that the person herself dwelt in those fragments, few and scattered as they were, and dwelt there multiplied to a power of which she falls ever so far short in the idea which we are accustomed to form of her as a whole. Because the letter has not—as the image of the beloved creature has—been contemplated by us in the melancholy calm of regret; we have read it, devoured it in the fearful anguish with which we were wrung by an unforeseen misfortune. Sorrows of this sort come to us in another way; from without; and it is along the road of the most cruel suffering that they have penetrated to our heart. The picture of our friend in our mind, which we believe to be old, original, authentic, has in reality been refashioned by her many times over. The cruel memory is not itself contemporary with the restored picture, it is of another age, it is one of the rare witnesses to a monstrous past. But inasmuch as this past continues to exist, save in ourselves, who have been pleased to substitute for it a miraculous age of gold, a paradise in which all mankind shall be reconciled, those memories, those letters carry us back to reality, and cannot but make us feel, by the sudden pang they give us, what a long way we have been borne from that reality by the baseless hopes engendered daily while we waited for something to happen. Not that the said reality is bound always to remain the same, though that does indeed happen at times. There are in our life any number of women whom we have never wished to see again, and who have quite naturally responded to our in no way calculated silence with a silence as profound. Only in their case as we never loved them, we have never counted the years spent apart from them, and this instance, which would invalidate our whole argument, we are inclined to forget when we are considering the healing effect of isolation, just as people who believe in presentiments forget all the occasions on which their own have not 'come true.'

But, after a time, absence may prove efficacious. The desire, the appetite for seeing us again may after all be reborn in the heart which at present contemns us. Only, we must allow time. Now the demands which we ourselves make upon time are no less exorbitant than those of a heart in process of changing. For one thing, time is the very thing that we are least willing to allow, for our own suffering is keen and we are anxious to see it brought to an end. And then, too, the interval of time which the other heart needs to effect its change our own heart will have spent in changing itself also, so that when the goal which we had set ourselves becomes attainable it will have ceased to count as a goal, or to seem worth attaining. This idea, however, that it will be attainable, that what, when it no longer spells any good fortune to us, we shall ultimately secure is not good fortune, this idea embodies a part, but a part only of the truth. Our good fortune accrues to us when we have grown indifferent to it. But the very fact of our indifference will have made us less exacting, and allow us in retrospect to feel convinced that we should have been in raptures over our good fortune had it come at a time when, very probably, it would have seemed to us miserably inadequate. People are not very hard to satisfy nor are they very good judges of matters in which they take no interest. The friendly overtures of a person whom we no longer love, overtures which strike us, in our indifference to her, as excessive, would perhaps have fallen a long way short of satisfying our love. Those tender speeches, that invitation or acceptance, we think only of the pleasure which they would have given us, and not of all those other speeches and meetings by which we should have wished to see them immediately followed, which we should, as likely as not, simply by our avidity for them, have precluded from ever happening. So that we can never be certain that the good fortune which comes to us too late, when we are no longer in love, is altogether the same as that good fortune the want of which made us, at one time, so unhappy. There is only one person who could decide that; our ego of those days; he is no longer with us, and were he to reappear, no doubt that would be quite enough to make our good fortune—whether identical or not—vanish.

Pending these posthumous fulfilments of a dream in which I should not, when the time came, be greatly interested, by dint of my having to invent, as in the days when I still hardly knew Gilberte, speeches, letters in which she implored my forgiveness, swore that she had never loved anyone but myself and besought me to marry her, a series of pleasant images incessantly renewed came by degrees to hold a larger place in my mind than the vision of Gilberte and the young man, which had nothing now to feed upon. At this point I should perhaps have resumed my visits to Mme. Swann but for a dream that came to me, in which one of my friends, who was not, however, one that I could identify, behaved with the utmost treachery towards me and appeared to believe that I had been treacherous to him. Abruptly awakened by the pain which this dream had given me, and finding that it persisted after I was awake, I turned my thoughts back to the dream, racked my brains to discover who could have been the friend whom I had seen in my sleep, the sound of whose name—a Spanish name—was no longer distinct in my ears. Combining Joseph's part with Pharaoh's, I set to work to interpret my dream. I knew that, when one is interpreting a dream, it is often a mistake to pay too much attention to the appearance of the people one saw in it, who may perhaps have been disguised or have exchanged faces, like those mutilated saints on the walls of cathedrals which ignorant archaeologists have restored, fitting the body of one to the head of another and confusing all their attributes and names. Those that people bear in a dream are apt to mislead us. The person with whom we are in love is to be recognised only by the intensity of the pain that we suffer. From mine I learned that, though transformed while I was asleep into a young man, the person whose recent betrayal still hurt me was Gilberte. I remembered then that, the last time I had seen her, on the day when her mother had forbidden her to go out to a dancing-lesson, she had, whether in sincerity or in make-believe, declined, laughing in a strange manner, to believe in the genuineness of my feeling for her. And by association this memory brought back to me another. Long before that, it had been Swann who would not believe in my sincerity, nor that I was a suitable friend for Gilberte. In vain had

I written to him, Gilberte had brought back my letter and had returned it to me with the same incomprehensible laugh. She had not returned it to me at once: I remembered now the whole of that scene behind the clump of laurels. As soon as one is unhappy one becomes moral. Gilberte's recent antipathy for me seemed to me a judgment delivered on me by life for my conduct that afternoon. Such judgments one imagines one can escape because one looks out for carriages when one is crossing the street, and avoids obvious dangers. But there are others that take effect within us. The accident comes from the side to which one has not been looking, from inside, from the heart. Gilberte's words: "If you like, we might go on wrestling," made me shudder. I imagined her behaving like that, at home perhaps, in the linen-room, with the young man whom I had seen escorting her along the Avenue des Champs-Elysées. And so, just as when, a little time back, I had believed myself to be calmly established in a state of happiness, it had been fatuous in me, now that I had abandoned all thought of happiness, to take for granted that at least I had grown and was going to remain calm. For, so long as our heart keeps enshrined with any permanence the image of another person, it is not only our happiness that may at any moment be destroyed; when that happiness has vanished, when we have suffered, and, later, when we have succeeded in lulling our sufferings to sleep, the thing then that is as elusive, as precarious as ever our happiness was, is our calm. Mine returned to me in the end, for the cloud which, lowering our resistance, tempering our desires, has penetrated, in the train of a dream, the enclosure of our mind, is bound, in course of time, to dissolve, permanence and stability being assured to nothing in this world, not even to grief. Besides, those whose suffering is due to love are, as we say of certain invalids, their own physicians. As consolation can come to them only from the person who is the cause of their grief, and as their grief is an emanation from that person, it is there, in their grief itself, that they must in the end find a remedy: which it will disclose to them at a given moment, for as long as they turn it over in their minds this grief will continue to shew them fresh aspects of the loved, the regretted creature, at one moment so intensely hateful that one has no longer the slightest desire to see her, since before finding enjoyment in her company one would have first to make her suffer, at another so pleasant that the pleasantness in which one has invested her one adds to her own stock of good qualities and finds in it a fresh reason for hope. But even although the anguish that had reawakened in me did at length grow calm, I no longer wished—except just occasionally—to visit Mme. Swann. In the first place because, among those who love and have been forsaken, the state of incessant—even if unconfessed—expectancy in which they live undergoes a spontaneous transformation, and, while to all appearance unchanged, substitutes for its original elements others that are precisely the opposite. The first were the consequences of—a reaction from—the painful incidents which had upset us. The tension of waiting for what is yet to come is mingled with fear, all the more since we desire at such moments, should no message come to us from her whom we love, to act for ourselves, and are none too confident of the success of a step which, once we have taken it, we may find it impossible to follow up. But presently, without our having noticed any change, this tension, which still endures, is sustained, we discover, no longer by our recollection of the past but by anticipation of an imaginary future. From that moment it is almost pleasant. Besides, the first state, by continuing for some time, has accustomed us to living in expectation. The suffering that we felt during those last meetings survives in us still, but is already lulled to sleep. We are in no haste to arouse it, especially as we do not see very clearly what to ask for now. The possession of a little more of the woman whom we love would only make more essential to us the part that we did not yet possess, which is bound to remain, whatever happens, since our requirements are begotten of our satisfactions, an irreducible quantity.

Another, final reason came later on to reinforce this, and to make me discontinue altogether my visits to Mme. Swann. This reason, slow in revealing itself, was not that I had now forgotten Gilberte but that I must make every effort to forget her as speedily as possible. No doubt, now that the keen edge of my suffering was dulled, my visits to Mme. Swann had become once again, for what sorrow remained in me, the sedative and distraction which had been so precious to me at first. But what made the sedative efficacious made the distraction impossible, namely that with these visits the memory of Gilberte was intimately blended. The distraction would be of no avail to me unless it was employed to combat a sentiment which the presence of Gilberte no longer nourished, thoughts, interests, passions in which Gilberte should have no part. These states of consciousness, to which the person whom we love remains a stranger, then occupy a place which, however small it may be at first, is always so much reconquered from the love that has been in unchallenged possession of our whole soul. We must seek to encourage these thoughts, to make them grow, while the sentiment which is no more now than a memory dwindles, so that the new elements introduced into our mind contest with that sentiment, wrest from it an ever increasing part of our soul, until at last the victory is complete. I decided that this was the only way in which my love could be killed, and I was still young enough, still courageous enough to undertake the attempt, to subject myself to that most cruel grief which springs from the certainty that, whatever time one may devote to the effort, it will prove successful in the end. The reason I now gave in my letters to Gilberte for refusing to see her was an allusion to some mysterious misunderstanding, wholly fictitious, which was supposed to have arisen between her and myself, and as to which I had hoped at first that Gilberte would insist upon my furnishing her with an explanation. But, as a matter of fact, never, even in the most insignificant relations in life, does a request for enlightenment come from a correspondent who knows that an obscure, untruthful, incriminating sentence has been written on purpose, so that he shall protest against it, and is only too glad to feel, when he reads it, that he possesses—and to keep in his own hands—the initiative in the coming operations. For all the more reason is this so in our more tender relations, in which love is endowed with so much eloquence, indifference with so little curiosity. Gilberte having never appeared to doubt nor sought to learn more about this misunderstanding, it became for me a real entity, to which I referred anew in every letter. And there is in these baseless situations, in the affectation of coldness, a sort of fascination which tempts one to persevere in them. By dint of writing: "Now that our hearts are sundered," so that Gilberte might answer: "But they are not. Do explain what you mean," I had gradually come to believe that they were. By constantly repeating, "Life may have changed for us, it will never destroy the feeling that we had for one another," in the hope of hearing myself, one day, say: "But there has been no change, the feeling is stronger now than ever it was," I was living with the idea that life had indeed changed, that we should keep only the memory of a feeling which no longer existed, as certain neurotics, from having at first pretended to be ill, end by becoming chronic invalids. Now, whenever I had to write to Gilberte, I brought my mind back to this imagined change, which, being now tacitly admitted by the silence which she preserved with regard to it in her replies, would in future subsist between us. Then Gilberte ceased to make a point of ignoring it. She too adopted my point of view; and, as in the speeches at official banquets, when the foreign Sovereign who is being entertained adopts practically the same expressions as have just been used by the Sovereign who is entertaining him, whenever I wrote to Gilberte: "Life may have parted us; the memory of the days when we knew one another will endure," she never failed to respond: "Life may have parted us; it cannot make us forget those happy hours which will always be dear to us both," (though we should have found it hard to say why or how 'Life' had parted us, or what change had occurred). My sufferings were no longer excessive. And yet, one day when I was telling her in a letter that I had heard of the death of our old barley-sugar woman in the Champs-Elysées, as I wrote the words: "I felt at once that this would distress you, in me it awakened a host of memories," I could not restrain myself from bursting into tears when I saw that I was speaking in the past tense, as though it were of some dead friend, now almost forgotten, of this love of which in spite of myself I had never ceased to think as of a thing still alive, or one that at least might be born again. Nothing can be more affectionate than this sort of correspondence between friends who do not wish to see one another any more. Gilberte's letters to me had all the delicate refinement of those which I used to write to people who did not matter, and shewed me the same apparent marks of affection, which it was so pleasant for me to receive from her.

But, as time went on, every refusal to see her disturbed me less. And as she became less dear to me, my painful memories were no longer strong enough to destroy by their incessant return the growing pleasure which I found in thinking of Florence, or of Venice. I regretted, at such moments, that I had abandoned the idea of diplomacy, and had condemned myself to a sedentary existence, in order not to be separated from a girl whom I should not see again and had already almost forgotten. We construct our house of life to suit another person, and when at length it is ready to receive her that person does not come; presently she is dead to us, and we live on, a prisoner within the walls which were intended only for her. If Venice seemed to my parents to be a long way off, and its climate treacherous, it was at least quite easy for me to go, without tiring myself, and settle down at Balbec. But to do that I should have had to leave Paris, to forego those visits thanks to which, infrequent as they were, I might sometimes hear Mme. Swann telling me about her daughter. Besides, I was beginning to find in them various pleasures in which Gilberte had no part.

When spring drew round, and with it the cold weather, during an icy Lent and the hailstorms of Holy Week, as Mme. Swann began to find it cold in the house, I used often to see her entertaining her guests in her furs, her shivering hands and shoulders hidden beneath the gleaming white carpet of an immense rectangular muff and a cape, both of ermine, which she had not taken off on coming in from her drive, and which suggested the last patches of the snows of winter, more persistent than the rest, which neither the heat of the fire nor the advancing season had succeeded in melting. And the whole truth about these glacial but already flowering weeks was suggested to me in this drawing-room, which soon I should be entering no more, by other more intoxicating forms of whiteness, that for example of the guelder-roses clustering, at the summits of their tall bare stalks, like the rectilinear trees in pre-Raphaelite paintings, their balls of blossom, divided yet composite, white as annunciating angels and breathing a fragrance as of lemons. For the mistress of Tansonville knew that April, even an ice-bound April, was not barren of flowers, that winter, spring, summer are not held apart by barriers as hermetic as might be supposed by the town-dweller who, until the first hot day, imagines the world as containing nothing but houses that stand naked in the rain. That Mme. Swann was content with the consignments furnished by her Combray gardener, that she did not, by the intervention of her own 'special' florist, fill up the gaps left by an insufficiently powerful magic with subsidies borrowed from a precocious Mediterranean shore, I do not for a moment suggest, nor did it worry me at the time. It was enough to fill me with longing for country scenes that, overhanging the loose snowdrifts of the muff in which Mme. Swann kept her hands, the guelder-rose snow-balls (which served very possibly in the mind of my hostess no other purpose than to compose, on the advice of Bergotte, a 'Symphony in White' with her furniture and her garments) reminded me that what the Good Friday music in *Parsifal* symbolised was a natural miracle which one could see performed every year, if one had the sense to look for it, and, assisted by the acid and heady perfume of the other kinds of blossom, which, although their names were unknown to me, had brought me so often to a standstill to gaze at them on my walks round Combray, made Mme. Swann's drawing-room as virginal, as candidly 'in bloom,' without the least vestige of greenery, as overladen with genuine scents of flowers as was the little lane by Tansonville.

But it was still more than I could endure that these memories should be recalled to me. There was a risk of their reviving what little remained of my love for Gilberte. Besides, albeit I no longer felt the least distress during these visits to Mme. Swann, I extended the intervals between them and endeavoured to see as little of her as possible. At most, since I continued not to go out of Paris, I allowed myself an occasional walk with her. Fine weather had come at last, and the sun was hot. As I knew that before luncheon Mme. Swann used to go out every day for an hour, and would stroll for a little in the Avenue du Bois, near the Etoile—a spot which, at that time, because of the people who used to collect there to gaze at the 'swells' whom they knew only by name, was known as the 'Shabby-Genteel Club'—I persuaded my parents, on Sundays (for on weekdays I was busy all morning), to let me postpone my luncheon until long after theirs, until a quarter past one, and go for a walk before it. During May, that year, I never missed a Sunday, for Gilberte had gone to stay with friends in the country. I used to reach the Arc de Triomphe about noon. I kept watch at the entrance to the Avenue, never taking my eyes off the corner of the side-street along which Mme. Swann, who had only a few yards to walk, would come from her house. As by this time many of the people who had been strolling there were going home to luncheon, those who remained were few in number and, for the most part, fashionably dressed. Suddenly, on the gravelled path, unhurrying, cool, luxuriant, Mme. Swann appeared, displaying around her a toilet which was never twice the same, but which I remember as being typically mauve; then she hoisted and unfurled at the end of its long stalk, just at the moment when her radiance was most complete, the silken banner of a wide parasol of a shade that matched the showering petals of her gown. A whole troop of people escorted her; Swann himself, four or five fellows from the Club, who had been to call upon her that morning or whom she had met in the street: and their black or grey agglomeration, obedient to her every gesture, performing the almost mechanical movements of a lifeless setting in which Odette was framed, gave to this woman, in whose eyes alone was there any intensity, the air of looking out in front of her, from among all those men, as from a window behind which she had taken her stand, and made her emerge there, frail but fearless, in the nudity of her delicate colours, like the apparition of a creature of a different species, of an unknown race, and of almost martial strength, by virtue of which she seemed by herself a match for all her multiple escort. Smiling, rejoicing in the fine weather, in the sunshine which had not yet become trying, with the air of calm assurance of a creator who has accomplished his task and takes no thought for anything besides; certain that her clothes—even though the vulgar herd should fail to appreciate them—were the smartest anywhere to be seen, she wore them for herself and for her friends, naturally, without exaggerated attention to them but also without absolute detachment; not preventing the little bows of ribbon upon her bodice and skirt from floating buoyantly upon the air before her, like separate creatures of whose presence there she was not unconscious, but was indulgent enough to let them play if they chose, keeping their own rhythm, provided that they accompanied her where she led the way; and even upon her mauve parasol, which, as often as not, she had not yet 'put up' when she appeared on the scene, she let fall now and then, as though upon a bunch of Parma violets, a gaze happy and so kindly that, when it was fastened no longer upon her friends but on some inanimate object, her eyes still seemed to smile. She thus kept open, she made her garments occupy that interval of smartness, of which the men with whom she was on the most familiar terms respected both the existence and its necessity, not without shewing a certain deference, as of profane visitors to a shrine, an admission of their own ignorance, an interval over which they recognised that their friend had (as we recognise that a sick man has over the special precautions that he has to take, or a mother over her children's education) a competent jurisdiction. No less than by the court which encircled her and seemed not to observe the passers-by, Mme. Swann by the lateness of her appearance there at once suggested those rooms in which she had spent so long, so leisurely a morning and to which she must presently return for luncheon; she seemed to indicate their proximity by the unhurrying ease of her progress, like the turn that one takes up and down one's own garden; of those rooms one would have said that she was carrying about her still the cool, the indoor shade. But for that very reason the sight of her gave me only a stronger sensation of open air and warmth. All the more because, being assured in my own mind that, in accordance with the liturgy, with the ritual in which Mme. Swann was so profoundly versed, her clothes were connected with the time of year and of day by a bond both inevitable and unique, I felt that the flowers upon the stiff straw brim of her hat, the baby-ribbons upon her dress, had been even more naturally born of the month of May than the flowers in gardens and in woods; and to learn what latest change there was in weather or season I had not to raise my eyes higher than to her parasol, open and outstretched like another, a nearer sky, round, clement, mobile, blue. For these rites, if they were of sovereign importance, subjugated their glory (and, consequently, Mme. Swann her own) in condescending obedience to the day, the spring, the sun, none of which struck me as being sufficiently flattered that so elegant a woman had been graciously pleased not to ignore their existence, and had chosen on their account a gown of a brighter, of a thinner fabric, suggesting to me, by the opening of its collar and sleeves, the moist warmness of the throat and wrists that they exposed,—in a word, had taken for them all the pains that a great personage takes who, having gaily condescended to pay a visit to common folk in the country, whom everyone, even the most plebeian, knows, yet makes a point of donning, for the occasion, suitable attire. On her arrival I would greet Mme. Swann, she stop me and say (in English) 'Good morning,' and smile. We would walk a little way together. And I learned then that these canons according to which she dressed, it was for her own satisfaction that she obeyed them, as though yielding to a Superior Wisdom of which she herself was High Priestess: for if it should happen that, feeling too warm, she threw open or even took off altogether and gave me to carry the jacket which she had intended to keep buttoned up, I would discover in the blouse beneath it a thousand details of execution which had had every chance of remaining there unperceived, like those parts of an orchestral score to which the composer has devoted infinite labour albeit they may never reach the ears of the public: or in the sleeves of the jacket that lay folded across my arm I would see, I would drink in slowly, for my own pleasure or from affection for its wearer, some exquisite detail, a deliciously tinted strip, a lining of mauve satinette which, ordinarily concealed from every eye, was yet just as delicately fashioned as the outer parts, like those gothic carvings on a cathedral, hidden on the inside of a balustrade eighty feet from the ground, as perfect as are the bas-reliefs over the main porch, and yet never seen by any living man until, happening to pass that way upon his travels, an artist obtains leave to climb up there among them, to stroll in the open air, sweeping the whole town with a comprehensive gaze, between the soaring towers.

What enhanced this impression that Mme. Swann was walking in the Avenue as though along the paths of her own garden, was—for people ignorant of her habit of 'taking exercise'—that she had come there on foot, without any carriage following, she whom, once May had begun, they were accustomed to see, behind the most brilliant 'turn-out,' the smartest liveries in Paris, gently and majestically seated, like a goddess, in the balmy air of an immense victoria on eight springs. On foot Mme. Swann had the appearance—especially as her pace began to slacken in the heat of the sun—of having yielded to curiosity, of committing an 'exclusive' breach of all the rules of her code, like those Crowned Heads who, without consulting anyone, accompanied by the slightly scandalised admiration of a suite which dares not venture any criticism, step out of their boxes during a gala performance and visit the lobby of the theatre, mingling for a moment or two with the rest of the audience. So between Mme. Swann and themselves the crowd felt that there existed those barriers of a certain kind of opulence which seem to them the most insurmountable that there are. The Faubourg Saint-Germain may have its barriers also, but these are less 'telling' to the eyes and imagination of the 'shabby-genteel.' These latter, when in the presence of a real personage, more simple, more easily mistaken for the wife of a small professional or business man, less remote from the people, will not feel the same sense of their own inequality, almost of their unworthiness, as dismays them when they encounter Mme. Swann. Of course women of that sort are not themselves dazzled, as the crowd are, by the brilliance of their apparel, they have ceased to pay any attention to it, but only because they have grown used to it, that is to say have come to look upon it more and more as natural and necessary, to judge their fellow creatures according as they are more or less initiated into these luxurious ways: so that (the grandeur which they allow themselves to display or discover in others being wholly material, easily verified, slowly acquired, the lack of it hard to compensate) if such women place a passer-by in the lowest rank of society, it is by the same instinctive process that has made them appear to him as in the highest, that is to say instinctively, at first sight, and without possibility of appeal. Perhaps that special class of society which included in those days women like Lady Israels, who mixed with the women of the aristocracy, and Mme. Swann, who was to get to know them later on, that intermediate class, inferior to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, since it 'ran after' the denizens of that quarter, but superior to everything that was not of the Faubourg Saint-

Germain, possessing this peculiarity that, while already detached from the world of the merely rich, it was riches still that it represented, but riches that had been canalised, serving a purpose, swayed by an idea that was artistic, malleable gold, chased with a poetic design, taught to smile; perhaps that class—in the same form, at least, and with the same charm—exists no longer. In any event, the women who were its members would not satisfy to-day what was the primary condition on which they reigned, since with advancing age they have lost—almost all of them—their beauty. Whereas it was (just as much as from the pinnacle of her noble fortune) from the glorious zenith of her ripe and still so fragrant summer that Mme. Swann, majestic, smiling, kind, as she advanced along the Avenue du Bois, saw like Hypatia, beneath the slow tread of her feet, worlds revolving. Various young men as they passed looked at her anxiously, not knowing whether their vague acquaintance with her (especially since, having been introduced only once, at the most, to Swann, they were afraid that he might not remember them) was sufficient excuse for their venturing to take off their hats. And they trembled to think of the consequences as they made up their minds, asking themselves whether the gesture, so bold, so sacrilegious a tempting of providence, would not let loose the catastrophic forces of nature or bring down upon them the vengeance of a jealous god. It provoked only, like the winding of a piece of clockwork, a series of gesticulations from little, responsive bowing figures, who were none other than Odette's escort, beginning with Swann himself, who raised his tall hat lined in green leather with an exquisite courtesy, which he had acquired in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, but to which was no longer wedded the indifference that he would at one time have shewn. Its place was now taken (as though he had been to some extent permeated by Odette's prejudices) at once by irritation at having to acknowledge the salute of a person who was none too well dressed and by satisfaction at his wife's knowing so many people, a mixed sensation to which he gave expression by saying to the smart friends who walked by his side: "What! another! Upon my word, I can't imagine where my wife picks all these fellows up!" Meanwhile, having greeted with a slight movement of her head the terrified youth, who had already passed out of sight though his heart was still beating furiously, Mme. Swann turned to me: "Then it's all over?" she put it to me, "You aren't ever coming to see Gilberte again? I'm glad you make an exception of me, and are not going to 'drop' me straight away. I like seeing you, but I used to like also the influence you had over my daughter. I'm sure she's very sorry about it, too. However, I mustn't bully you, or you'll make up your mind at once that you never want to set eyes on me again." "Odette, Sagan's trying to speak to you!" Swann called his wife's attention. And there, indeed, was the Prince, as in some transformation scene at the close of a play, or in a circus, or an old painting, wheeling his horse round so as to face her, in a magnificent heroic pose, and doffing his hat with a sweeping theatrical and, so to speak, allegorical flourish in which he displayed all the chivalrous courtesy of a great noble bowing in token of his respect for Woman, were she incarnate in a woman whom it was impossible for his mother or his sister to know. And at every moment, recognised in the depths of the liquid transparency and of the luminous glaze of the shadow which her parasol cast over her, Mme. Swann was receiving the salutations of the last belated horsemen, who passed as though in a cinematograph taken as they galloped in the blinding glare of the Avenue, men from the clubs, the names of whom, which meant only celebrities to the public, Antoine de Castellane, Adalbert de Montmorency and the rest—were for Mme. Swann the familiar names of friends. And as the average span of life, the relative longevity of our memories of poetical sensations is much greater than that of our memories of what the heart has suffered, long after the sorrows that I once felt on Gilberte's account have faded and vanished, there has survived them the pleasure that I still derive—whenever I close my eyes and read, as it were upon the face of a sundial, the minutes that are recorded between a quarter past twelve and one o'clock in the month of May—from seeing myself once again strolling and talking thus with Mme. Swann beneath her parasol, as though in the coloured shade of a wistaria bower.

PLACE-NAMES: THE PLACE

I HAD arrived at a state almost of complete indifference to Gilberte when, two years later, I went with my grandmother to Balbec. When I succumbed to the attraction of a strange face, when it was with the help of some other girl that I hoped to discover gothic cathedrals, the palaces and gardens of Italy, I said to myself sadly that this love of ours, in so far as it is love for one particular creature, is not perhaps a very real thing, since if the association of pleasant or unpleasant trains of thought can attach it for a time to a woman so as to make us believe that it has been inspired by her, in a necessary sequence of effect to cause, yet when we detach ourselves, deliberately or unconsciously, from those associations, this love, as though it were indeed a spontaneous thing and sprang from ourselves alone, will revive in order to bestow itself on another woman. At the time, however, of my departure for Balbec, and during the earlier part of my stay there, my indifference was still only intermittent. Often, our life being so careless of chronology, interpolating so many anachronisms in the sequence of our days, I lived still among those—far older days than yesterday or last week—in which I loved Gilberte. And at once not seeing her became as exquisite a torture to me as it had been then. The self that had loved her, which another self had already almost entirely supplanted, rose again in me, stimulated far more often by a trivial than by an important event. For instance, if I may anticipate for a moment my arrival in Normandy, I heard some one who passed me on the sea-front at Balbec refer to the 'Secretary to the Ministry of Posts and his family.' Now, seeing that as yet I knew nothing of the influence which that family was to exercise over my life, this remark ought to have passed unheeded; instead, it gave me at once an acute twinge, which a self that had for the most part long since been outgrown in me felt at being parted from Gilberte. Because I had never given another thought to a conversation which Gilberte had had with her father in my hearing, in which allusion was made to the Secretary to the Ministry of Posts and to his family. Now our love memories present no exception to the general rules of memory, which in turn are governed by the still more general rules of Habit. And as Habit weakens every impression, what a person recalls to us most vividly is precisely what we had forgotten, because it was of no importance, and had therefore left in full possession of its strength. That is why the better part of our memory exists outside ourselves, in a blatter of rain, in the smell of an unaired room or of the first crackling brushwood fire in a cold grate: wherever, in short, we happen upon what our mind, having no use for it, had rejected, the last treasure that the past has in store, the richest, that which when all our flow of tears seems to have dried at the source can make us weep again. Outside ourselves, did I say; rather within ourselves, but hidden from our eyes in an oblivion more or less prolonged. It is thanks to this oblivion alone that we can from time to time recover the creature that we were, range ourselves face to face with past events as that creature had to face them, suffer afresh because we are no longer ourselves but he, and because he loved what leaves us now indifferent. In the broad daylight of our ordinary memory the images of the past turn gradually pale and fade out of sight, nothing remains of them, we shall never find them again. Or rather we should never find them again had not a few words (such as this 'Secretary to the Ministry of Posts') been carefully locked away in oblivion, just as an author deposits in the National Library a copy of a book which might otherwise become unobtainable.

But this suffering and this recrudescence of my love for Gilberte lasted no longer than such things last in a dream, and this time, on the contrary, because at Balbec the old Habit was no longer there to keep them alive. And if these two effects of Habit appear to be incompatible, that is because Habit is bound by a diversity of laws. In Paris I had grown more and more indifferent to Gilberte, thanks to Habit. The change of habit, that is to say the temporary cessation of Habit, completed Habit's task when I started for Balbec. It weakens, but it stabilises; it leads to disintegration but it makes the scattered elements last indefinitely. Day after day, for years past, I had begun by modelling my state of mind, more or less effectively, upon that of the day before. At Balbec, a strange bed, to the side of which a tray was brought in the morning that differed from my Paris breakfast tray, could not, obviously, sustain the fancies upon which my love for Gilberte had fed: there are cases (though not, I admit, commonly) in which, one's days being paralysed by a sedentary life, the best way to save time is to change one's place of residence. My journey to Balbec was like the first outing of a convalescent who needed only that to convince him that he was cured.

The journey was one that would now be made, probably, in a motorcar, which would be supposed to render it more interesting. We shall see too that, accomplished in such a way, it would even be in a sense more genuine, since one would be following more nearly, in a closer intimacy, the various contours by which the surface of the earth is wrinkled. But after all the special attraction of the journey lies not in our being able to alight at places on the way and to stop altogether as soon as we grow tired, but in its making the difference between departure and arrival not as imperceptible but as intense as possible, so that we are conscious of it in its totality, intact, as it existed in our mind when imagination bore us from the place in which we were living right to the very heart of a place we longed to see, in a single sweep which seemed miraculous to us not so much because it covered a certain distance as because it united two distinct individualities of the world, took us from one name to another name; and this difference is accentuated (more than in a form of locomotion in which, since one can stop and alight where one chooses, there can scarcely be said to be any point of arrival) by the mysterious operation that is performed in those peculiar places, railway stations, which do not constitute, so to speak, a part of the surrounding town but contain the essence of its personality just as upon their sign-boards they bear its painted name.

But in this respect as in every other, our age is infected with a mania for shewing things only in the environment that properly belongs to them, thereby suppressing the essential thing, the act of the mind which isolated them from that environment. A picture is nowadays 'presented' in the midst of furniture, ornaments, hangings of the same period, a second-hand scheme of decoration in the composition of which in the houses of to-day excels that same hostess who but yesterday was so crassly ignorant, but now spends her time poring over records and in libraries; and among these the masterpiece at which we glance up from the table while we dine does not give us that exhilarating delight which we can expect from it only in a public gallery, which symbolises far better by its bareness, by the absence of all irritating detail, those innermost spaces into which the artist withdrew to create it.

Unhappily those marvellous places which are railway stations, from which one sets out for a remote destination, are tragic places also, for if in them the miracle is accomplished whereby scenes which hitherto have had no existence save in our minds are to become the scenes among which we shall be living, for that very reason we must, as we emerge from the waiting-room, abandon any thought of finding ourself once again within the familiar walls which, but a moment ago, were still enclosing us. We must lay aside all hope of going home to sleep in our own bed, once we have made up our mind to penetrate into the pestiferous cavern through which we may have access to the mystery, into one of those vast, glass-roofed sheds, like that of Saint-Lazare into which I must go to find the train for Balbec, and which extended over the rent bowels of the city one of those bleak and boundless skies, heavy with an accumulation of dramatic menaces, like certain skies painted with an almost Parisian modernity by Mantegna or Veronese, beneath which could be accomplished only some solemn and tremendous act, such as a departure by train or the Elevation of the Cross.

So long as I had been content to look out from the warmth of my own bed in Paris at the Persian church of Balbec, shrouded in driving sleet, no sort of objection to this journey had been offered by my body. Its objections began only when it had gathered that it would have itself to take part in the journey, and that on the evening of my arrival I should be shewn to 'my' room which to my body would be unknown. Its revolt was all the more deep-rooted in that on the very eve of my departure I learned that my mother would not be coming with us, my father, who would be kept busy at the Ministry until it was time for him to start for Spain with M. de Norpois, having preferred to take a house in the neighbourhood of Paris. On the other hand, the spectacle of Balbec seemed to me none the less desirable because I must purchase it at the price of a discomfort which, on the contrary, I felt to indicate and to guarantee the reality of the impression which I was going there to seek, an impression the place of which no spectacle of professedly equal value, no 'panorama' which I might have gone to see without being thereby precluded from returning home to sleep in my own bed, could possibly have filled. It was not for the first time that I felt that those who love and those who find pleasure are not always the same. I believed myself to be longing fully as much for Balbec as the doctor who was treating me, when he said to me, surprised, on the morning of our departure, to see me look so unhappy, "I don't mind telling you that if I could only manage a week to go down and get a blow by the sea, I shouldn't wait to be asked twice. You'll be having races, regattas; you don't know what all!" But I had already learned the lesson—long before I was taken to hear Berma—that, whatever it might be that I loved, it would never be attained save at the end of a long and heart-rending pursuit, in the course of which I should have first to sacrifice my own pleasure to that paramount good instead of seeking it there.

My grandmother, naturally enough, looked upon our exodus from a somewhat different point of view, and (for she was still as anxious as ever that the presents which were made me should take some artistic form) had planned, so that she might be offering me, of this journey, a 'print' that was, at least, in parts 'old,' that we should repeat, partly by rail and partly by road, the itinerary that Mme. de Sévigné followed when she went from Paris to 'L'Orient' by way of Chaulnes and 'the Pont-Audemer.' But my grandmother had been obliged to abandon this project, at the instance of my father who knew, whenever she organised any expedition with a view to extracting from it the utmost intellectual benefit that it was capable of yielding, what a tale there would be to tell of missed trains, lost luggage, sore throats and broken rules. She was free at least to rejoice in the thought that never, when the time came for us to sally forth to the beach, should we be exposed to the risk of being kept indoors by the sudden appearance of what her beloved Sévigné calls a 'beast of a coachload,' since we should know not a soul at Balbec, Legrandin having refrained from offering us a letter of introduction to his sister. (This abstention had not been so well appreciated by my aunts Céline and Flora, who, having known as a child that lady, of whom they had always spoken until then, to commemorate this early intimacy, as 'Renée de Cambremer,' and having had from her and still possessing a number of those little presents which continue to ornament a room or a conversation but to which the feeling between the parties no longer corresponds, imagined that they were avenging the insult offered to us by never uttering again, when they called upon Mme. Legrandin, the name of her daughter, confining themselves to a mutual congratulation, once they were safely out of the house: "I made no reference to you know whom!" "I think that went home!")

And so we were simply to leave Paris by that one twenty-two train which I had too often beguiled myself by looking out in the railway timetable, where its itinerary never failed to give me the emotion, almost the illusion of starting by it, not to feel that I already knew it. As the delineation in our mind of the features of any form of happiness depends more on the nature of the longings that it inspires in us than on the accuracy of the information which we have about it, I felt that I knew this train in all its details, nor did I doubt that I should feel, sitting in one of its compartments, a special delight as the day began to cool, should be contemplating this or that view as the train approached one or another station; so much so that this train, which always brought to my mind's eye the images of the same towns, which I bathed in the sunlight of those post-meridian hours through which it sped, seemed to me to be different from every other train; and I had ended—as we are apt to do with a person whom we have never seen but of whom we like to believe that we have won his friendship—by giving a distinct and unalterable cast of countenance to the traveller, artistic, golden-haired, who would thus have taken me with him upon his journey, and to whom I should bid farewell beneath the Cathedral of Saint-Lô, before he hastened to overtake the setting sun.

As my grandmother could not bring herself to do anything so 'stupid' as to go straight to Balbec, she was to break the journey half-way, staying the night with one of her friends, from whose house I was to proceed the same evening, so as not to be in the way there and also in order that I might arrive by daylight and see Balbec Church, which, we had learned, was at some distance from Balbec-Plage, so that I might not have a chance to visit it later on, when I had begun my course of baths. And perhaps it was less painful for me to feel that the desirable goal of my journey stood between me and that cruel first night on which I should have to enter a new habitation, and consent to dwell there. But I had had first to leave the old; my mother had arranged to 'move in,' that afternoon, at Saint-Cloud, and had made, or pretended to make, all the arrangements for going there directly after she had seen us off at the station, without needing to call again at our own house to which she was afraid that I might otherwise feel impelled at the last moment, instead of going to Balbec, to return with her. In fact, on the pretext of having so much to see to in the house which she had just taken and of being pressed for time, but in reality so as to spare me the cruel ordeal of a long-drawn parting, she had decided not to wait with us until that moment of the signal to start at which, concealed hitherto among ineffective comings and goings and preparations that lead to nothing definite, separation is made suddenly manifest, impossible to endure when it is no longer possibly to be avoided, concentrated in its entirety in one enormous instant of impotent and supreme lucidity.

For the first time I began to feel that it was possible that my mother might live without me, otherwise than for me, a separate life. She was going to stay with my father, whose existence it may have seemed to her that my feeble health, my nervous excitability complicated somewhat and saddened. This separation made me all the more wretched because I told myself that it probably marked for my mother an end of the successive disappointments which I had caused her, of which she had never said a word to me but which had made her realise the difficulty of our taking our holidays together; and perhaps also the first trial of a form of existence to which she was beginning, now, to resign herself for the future, as the years crept on for my father and herself, an existence in which I should see less of her, in which (a thing that not even in my nightmares had yet been revealed to me) she would already have become something of a stranger, a lady who might be seen going home by herself to a house in which I should not be, asking the porter whether there was not a letter for her from me.

I could scarcely answer the man in the station who offered to take my bag. My mother, to comfort me, tried the methods which seemed to her most efficacious. Thinking it to be useless to appear not to notice my unhappiness, she gently teased me about it:

"Well, and what would Balbec church say if it knew that people pulled long faces like that when they were going to see it? Surely this is not the enraptured tourist Ruskin speaks of. Besides, I shall know if you rise to the occasion, even when we are miles apart I shall still be with my little man. You shall have a letter to-morrow from Mamma."

"My dear," said my grandmother, "I picture you like Mme. de Sévigné, your eyes glued to the map, and never losing sight of us for an instant."

Then Mamma sought to distract my mind, asked me what I thought of having for dinner, drew my attention to Françoise, complimented her on a hat and cloak which she did not recognise, in spite of their having horrified her long ago when she first saw them, new, upon my great-aunt, one with an immense bird towering over it, the other decorated with a hideous pattern and jet beads. But the cloak having grown too shabby to wear, Françoise had had it turned, exposing an 'inside' of plain cloth and quite a good colour. As for the bird, it had long since come to grief and been thrown away. And just as it is disturbing, sometimes, to find the effects which the most conscious artists attain only by an effort occurring in a folk-song, on the wall of some peasant's cottage where above the door, at the precisely right spot in the composition, blooms a white or yellow rose—so the velvet band, the loop of ribbon which would have delighted one in a portrait by Chardin or Whistler, Françoise had set with a simple but unerring taste upon the hat, which was now charming.

To take a parallel from an earlier age, the modesty and integrity which often gave an air of nobility to the face of our old servant having spread also to the garments which, as a woman reserved but not humbled, who knew how to hold her own and to keep her place, she had put on for the journey so as to be fit to be seen in our company without at the same time seeming or wishing to make herself conspicuous,—Françoise in the cherry-coloured cloth, now faded, of her cloak, and the discreet nap of her fur collar, brought to mind one of those miniatures of Anne of Brittany painted in Books of Hours by an old master, in which everything is so exactly in the right place, the sense of the whole is so evenly distributed throughout the parts that the rich and obsolete singularity of the costume expresses the same pious gravity as the eyes, lips and hands.

Of thought, in relation to Françoise, one could hardly speak. She knew nothing, in that absolute sense in which to know nothing means to understand nothing, save the rare truths to which the heart is capable of directly attaining. The vast world of ideas existed not for her. But when one studied the clearness of her gaze, the lines of nose and lips, all those signs lacking from so many people of culture in whom they would else have signified a supreme distinction, the noble detachment of a chosen spirit, one was disquieted, as one is by the frank, intelligent eyes of a dog, to which, nevertheless, one knows that all our human concepts must be alien, and was led to ask oneself whether there might not be, among those other humble brethren, our peasant countrymen, creatures who were, like the great ones of the earth, of simple mind, or rather, doomed by a harsh fate to live among the simple-minded, deprived of heavenly light, were yet more naturally, more instinctively akin to the chosen spirits than most educated people, were, so to speak, all members, though scattered, straying, robbed of their heritage of reason, of the celestial family, kinsfolk, that have been lost in infancy, of the loftiest minds to whom—as is apparent from the unmistakable light in their eyes, although they can concentrate that light on nothing—there has been lacking, to endow them with talent, knowledge only.

My mother, seeing that I had difficulty in keeping back my tears, said to me: "'Regulus was in the habit, when things looked grave. . . .' Besides, it isn't nice for Mamma! What does Mme. de Sévigné say? Your grandmother will tell you: 'I shall be obliged to draw upon all the courage that you lack.'" And remembering that affection for another distracts one's selfish griefs, she endeavoured to beguile me by telling me that she expected the removal to Saint-Cloud to go without a hitch, that she liked the cab, which she had kept waiting, that the driver seemed civil and the seats comfortable. I made an effort to smile at these trifles, and bowed my head with an air of acquiescence and satisfaction. But they helped me only to depict to myself with more accuracy Mamma's imminent departure, and it was with an agonised heart that I gazed at her as though she were already torn from me, beneath that wide-brimmed straw hat which she had bought to wear in the country, in a flimsy dress which she had put on in view of the long drive through the sweltering midday heat; hat and dress making her some one else, some one who belonged already to the Villa Montretout, in which I should not see her.

To prevent the choking fits which the journey might otherwise give me the doctor had advised me to take, as we started, a good stiff dose of beer or brandy, so as to begin the journey in a state of what he called 'euphoria,' in which the nervous system is for a time less vulnerable. I had not yet made up my mind whether I should do this, but I wished at least that my grandmother should admit that, if I did so decide, I should have wisdom and authority on my side. I spoke therefore as if my hesitation were concerned only with where I should go for my drink, to the bar on the platform or to the restaurant-car on the train. But immediately, at the air of reproach which my grandmother's face assumed, an air of not wishing even to entertain such an idea for a moment, "What!" I said to myself, suddenly determining upon this action of going out to drink, the performance of which became necessary as a proof of my independence since the verbal announcement of it had not succeeded in passing unchallenged, "What! You know how ill I am, you know what the doctor ordered, and you treat me like this!"

When I had explained to my grandmother how unwell I felt, her distress, her kindness were so apparent as she replied, "Run along then, quickly; get yourself some beer or a liqueur if it will do you any good," that I flung myself upon her, almost smothering her in kisses. And if after that I went and drank a great deal too much in the restaurant-car of the train, that was because I felt that otherwise I should have a more violent attack than usual, which was just what would vex her most. When at the first stop I clambered back into our compartment I told my grandmother how pleased I was to be going to Balbec, that I felt that everything would go off splendidly, that after all I should soon grow used to being without Mamma, that the train was most comfortable, the steward and attendants in the bar so friendly that I should like to make the journey often so as to have opportunities of seeing them again. My grandmother, however, did not appear to feel the same joy as myself at all these good tidings. She answered, without looking me in the face:

"Why don't you try to get a little sleep?" and turned her gaze to the window, the blind of which, though we had drawn it, did not completely cover the glass, so that the sun could and did slip in over the polished oak of the door and the cloth of the seat (like an advertisement of a life shared with nature far more persuasive than those posted higher upon the walls of the compartment, by the railway company, representing places in the country the names of which I could not make out from where I sat) the same warm and slumberous light which lies along a forest glade.

But when my grandmother thought that my eyes were shut I could see her, now and again, from among the large black spots on her veil, steal a glance at me, then withdraw it, and steal back again, like a person trying to make himself, so as to get into the habit, perform some exercise that hurts him.

Thereupon I spoke to her, but that seemed not to please her either. And yet to myself the sound of my own voice was pleasant, as were the most imperceptible, the most internal movements of my body. And so I endeavoured to prolong it. I allowed each of my inflexions to hang lazily upon its word, I felt each glance from my eyes arrive just at the spot to which it was directed and stay there beyond the normal period. "Now, now, sit still and rest," said my grandmother. "If you can't manage to sleep, read something." And she handed me a volume of Madame de Sévigné which I opened, while she buried herself in the *Mémoires de Madame de Beausergent*. She never travelled anywhere without a volume of each. They were her two favourite authors. With no conscious movement of my head, feeling a keen pleasure in maintaining a posture after I had adopted it, I lay back holding in my hands the volume of Madame de Sévigné which I had allowed to close, without lowering my eyes to it, or indeed letting them see anything but the blue window-blind. But the contemplation of this blind appeared to me an admirable thing, and I should not have troubled to answer anyone who might have sought to distract me from contemplating it. The blue colour of this blind seemed to me, not perhaps by its beauty but by its intense vivacity, to efface so completely all the colours that had passed before my eyes from the day of my birth up to the moment in which I had gulped down the last of my drink and it had begun to take effect, that when compared with this blue they were as drab, as void as must be retrospectively the darkness in which he has lived to a man born blind whom a subsequent operation has at length enabled to see and to distinguish colours. An old ticket-collector came to ask for our tickets. The silvery gleam that shone from the metal buttons of his jacket charmed me in spite of my absorption. I wanted to ask him to sit down beside us. But he passed on to the next carriage, and I thought with longing of the life led by railwaymen for whom, since they spent all their time on the line, hardly a day could pass without their seeing this old collector. The pleasure that I found in staring at the blind, and in feeling that my mouth was half-open, began at length to diminish. I became more mobile; I even moved in my seat; I opened the book that my grandmother had given me and turned its pages casually, reading whatever caught my eye. And as I read I felt my admiration for Madame de Sévigné grow.

It is a mistake to let oneself be taken in by the purely formal details, idioms of the period or social conventions, the effect of which is that certain people believe that they have caught the Sévigné manner when they have said: "Tell me, my dear," or "That Count struck me as being a man of parts," or "Haymaking is the sweetest thing in the world." Mme. de Simiane imagines already that she is being like her grandmother because she can write: "M. de la Boulie is bearing wonderfully, Sir, and is in excellent condition to hear the news of his death," or "Oh, my dear Marquis, how your letter enchanted me! What can I do but answer it?" or "Meseems, Sir, that you owe me a letter, and I owe you some boxes of bergamot. I discharge my debt to the number of eight; others shall follow. . . . Never has the soil borne so many. Apparently for your gratification." And she writes in this style also her letter on bleeding, on lemons and so forth, supposing it to be typical of the letters of Madame de Sévigné. But my grandmother who had approached that lady from within, attracted to her by her own love of kinsfolk and of nature, had taught me to enjoy the real beauties of her correspondence, which are altogether different. They were presently to strike me all the more forcibly inasmuch as Madame de Sévigné is a great artist of the same school as a painter whom I was to meet at Balbec, where his influence on my way of seeing things was immense. I realised at Balbec that it was in the same way as he that she presented things to her readers, in the order of our perception of them, instead of first having to explain them in relation to their several causes. But already that afternoon in the railway carriage, as I read over again that letter in which the moonlight comes: "I cannot resist the temptation: I put on all my bonnets and veils, though there is no need of them, I walk along this mall, where the air is as sweet as in my chamber; I find a thousand phantasms, monks white and black, sisters grey and white, linen cast here and there on the ground, men enshrouded upright against the tree-trunks," I was enraptured by what, a little later, I should have described (for does not she draw landscapes in the same way as he draws characters?) as the Dostoievsky side of Madame de Sévigné's Letters.

When, that evening, after having accompanied my grandmother to her destination and spent some hours in her friend's house, I had returned by myself to the train, at any rate I found nothing to distress me in the night which followed; this was because I had not to spend it in a room the somnolence of which would have kept me awake; I was surrounded by the soothing activity of all those movements of the train which kept me company, offered to stay and converse with me if I could not sleep, lulled me with their sounds which I wedded—as I had often wedded the chime of the Combray bells—now to one rhythm, now to another (hearing as the whim took me first four level and equivalent semi-quavers, then one semi-quaver furiously dashing against a crotchet); they neutralised the centrifugal force of my insomnia by exercising upon it a contrary pressure which kept me in equilibrium and on which my immobility and presently my drowsiness felt themselves to be borne with the same sense of refreshment that I should have had, had I been resting under the protecting vigilance of powerful forces, on the breast of nature and of life, had I been able for a moment to incarnate myself in a fish that sleeps in the sea, driven unheeding by the currents and the tides, or in an eagle outstretched upon the air, with no support but the storm.

Sunrise is a necessary concomitant of long railway journeys, just as are hard-boiled eggs, illustrated papers, packs of cards, rivers upon which boats strain but make no progress. At a certain moment, when I was counting over the thoughts that had filled my mind, in the preceding minutes, so as to discover whether I had just been asleep or not (and when the very uncertainty which made me ask myself the question was to furnish me with an affirmative answer), in the pale square of the window, over a small black wood I saw some ragged clouds whose fleecy edges were of a fixed, dead pink, not liable to change, like the colour that dyes the wing which has grown to wear it, or the sketch upon which the artist's fancy has washed it. But I felt that, unlike them, this colour was due neither to inertia nor to caprice but to necessity and life. Presently there gathered behind it reserves of light. It brightened; the sky turned to a crimson which I strove, gluing my eyes to the window, to see more clearly, for I felt that it was related somehow to the most intimate life of Nature, but, the course of the line altering, the train turned, the morning scene gave place in the frame of the window to a nocturnal village, its roofs still blue with moonlight, its pond encrusted with the opalescent nacre of night, beneath a firmament still powdered with all its stars, and I was lamenting the loss of my strip of pink sky when I caught sight of it afresh, but red this time, in the opposite window which it left at a second bend in the line, so that I spent my time running from one window to the other to reassemble, to collect on a single canvas the intermittent, antipodean fragments of my fine, scarlet, ever-changing morning, and to obtain a comprehensive view of it and a continuous picture.

The scenery became broken, abrupt, the train stopped at a little station between two mountains. Far down the gorge, on the edge of a hurrying stream, one could see only a solitary watch-house, deep-planted in the water which ran past on a level with its windows. If a person can be the product of a soil the peculiar charm of which one distinguishes in that person, more even than the peasant girl whom I had so desperately longed to see appear when I wandered by myself along the Méséglise way, in the woods of Roussainville, such a person must be the big girl whom I now saw emerge from the house and, climbing a path lighted by the first slanting rays of the sun, come towards the station carrying a jar of milk. In her valley from which its congregated summits hid the rest of the world, she could never see anyone save in these trains which stopped for a moment only. She passed down the line of windows, offering coffee and milk to a few awakened passengers. Purpled with the glow of morning, her face was rosier than the sky. I felt in her presence that desire to live which is reborn in us whenever we become conscious anew of beauty and of happiness. We invariably forget that these are individual qualities, and, substituting for them in our mind a conventional type at which we arrive by striking a sort of mean amongst the different faces that have taken our fancy, the pleasures we have known, we are left with mere abstract images which are lifeless and dull because they are lacking in precisely that element of novelty, different from anything we have known, that element which is proper to beauty and to happiness. And we deliver on life a pessimistic judgment which we suppose to be fair, for we believed that we were taking into account when we formed it happiness and beauty, whereas in fact we left them out and replaced them by syntheses in which there is not a single atom of either. So it is that a well-read man will at once begin to yawn with boredom when anyone speaks to him of a new 'good book,' because he imagines a sort of composite of all the good books that he has read and knows already, whereas a good book is something special, something incalculable, and is made up not of the sum of all previous masterpieces but of something which the most thorough assimilation of every one of them would not enable him to discover, since it exists not in their sum but beyond it. Once he has become acquainted with this new work, the well-read man, till then apathetic, feels his interest awaken in the reality which it depicts. So, alien to the models of beauty which my fancy was wont to sketch when I was by myself, this strapping girl gave me at once the sensation of a certain happiness (the sole form, always different, in which we may learn the sensation of happiness), of a happiness that would be realised by my staying and living there by her side. But in this again the temporary cessation of Habit played a great part. I was giving the milk-girl the benefit of what was really my own entire being, ready to taste the keenest joys, which now confronted her. As a rule it is with our being reduced to a minimum that we live, most of our faculties lie dormant because they can rely upon Habit, which knows what there is to be done and has no need of their services. But on this morning of travel, the interruption of the routine of my existence, the change of place and time, had made their presence indispensable. My habits, which were sedentary and not matutinal, played me false, and all my faculties came hurrying to take their place, vying with one another in their zeal, rising, each of them, like waves in a storm, to the same unaccustomed level, from the basest to the most exalted, from breath, appetite, the circulation of my blood to receptivity and imagination. I cannot say whether, so as to make me believe that this girl was unlike the rest of women, the rugged charm of these barren tracts had been added to her own, but if so she gave it back to them. Life would have seemed an exquisite thing to me if only I had been free to spend it, hour after hour, with her, to go with her to the stream, to the cow, to the train, to be always at her side, to feel that I was known to her, had my place in her thoughts. She would have initiated me into the delights of country life and of the first hours of the day. I signalled to her to give me some of her coffee. I felt that I must be noticed by her. She did not see me; I called to her. Above her body, which was of massive build, the complexion of her face was so burnished and so ruddy that she appeared almost as though I were looking at her through a lighted window. She had turned and was coming towards me; I could not take my eyes from her face which grew larger as she approached, like a sun which it was somehow possible to arrest in its course and draw towards one, letting itself be seen at close quarters, blinding the eyes with its blaze of red and gold. She fastened on me her penetrating stare, but while the porters ran along the platform shutting doors the train had begun to move. I saw her leave the station and go down the hill to her home; it was broad daylight now; I was speeding away from the dawn. Whether my exaltation had been produced by this girl or had on the other hand been responsible for most of the pleasure that I had found in the sight of her, in the sense of her presence, in either event she was so closely associated with it that my desire to see her again was really not so much a physical as a mental desire, not to allow this state of enthusiasm to perish utterly, not to be separated for ever from the person who, although quite unconsciously, had participated in it. It was not only because this state was a pleasant one. It was principally because (just as increased tension upon a cord or accelerated vibration of a nerve produces a different sound or colour) it gave another tonality to all that I saw, introduced me as an actor upon the stage of an unknown and infinitely more interesting universe; that handsome girl whom I still could see, while the train gathered speed, was like part of a life other than the life that I knew, separated from it by a clear boundary, in which the sensations that things produced in me were no longer the same, from which to return now to my old life would be almost suicide. To procure myself the pleasure of feeling that I had at least an attachment to this new life, it would suffice that I should live near enough to the little station to be able to come to it every morning for a cup of coffee from the girl. But alas, she must be for ever absent from the other life towards which I was being borne with ever increasing swiftness, a life to the prospect of which I resigned myself only by weaving plans that would enable me to take the same train again some day and to stop at the same station, a project which would have the further advantage of providing with subject matter the selfish, active, practical, mechanical, indolent, centrifugal tendency which is that of the human mind; for our mind turns readily aside from the effort which is required if it is to analyse in itself, in a general and disinterested manner, a pleasant impression which we have received. And as, on the other hand, we wish to continue to think of that impression, the mind prefers to imagine it in the future tense, which while it gives us no clue as to the real nature of the thing, saves us the trouble of recreating it in our own consciousness and allows us to hope that we may receive it afresh from without.

Certain names of towns, Vezelay or Chartres, Bourges or Beauvais, serve to indicate, by abbreviation, the principal church in those towns. This partial acceptation, in which we are so accustomed to take the word, comes at length—if the names in question are those of places that we do not yet know—to fashion for us a mould of the name as a solid whole, which from that time onwards, whenever we wish it to convey the idea of the town—of that town which we have never seen—will impose on it, as on a cast, the same carved outlines, in the same style of art, will make of the town a sort of vast cathedral. It was, nevertheless, in a railway-station, above the door of a refreshment-room, that I read the name—almost Persian in style—of Balbec. I strode buoyantly through the station and across the avenue that led past it, I asked my way to the beach so as to see nothing in the place but its church and the sea; people seemed not to understand what I meant. Old Balbec, Balbec-en-Terre, at which I had arrived, had neither beach nor harbour. It was, most certainly, in the sea that the fishermen had found, according to the legend, the miraculous Christ, of which a window in the church that stood a few yards from where I now was recorded the discovery; it was indeed from cliffs battered by the waves that had been quarried the stone of its nave and towers. But this sea, which for those reasons I had imagined as flowing up to die at the foot of the window, was twelve miles away and more, at Balbec-Plage, and, rising beside its cupola, that steeple, which, because I had read that it was itself a rugged Norman cliff on which seeds were blown and sprouted, round which the sea-birds wheeled, I had always pictured to myself as receiving at its base the last drying foam of the uplifted waves, stood on a Square from which two lines of tramway diverged, opposite a Café which bore, written in letters of gold, the word 'Billiards'; it stood out against a background of houses with the roofs of which no upstanding mast was blended. And the church—entering my mind with the Café, with the passing stranger of whom I had had to ask my way, with the station to which presently I should have to return—made part of the general whole, seemed an accident, a by-product of this summer afternoon, in which its mellow and distended dome against the sky was like a fruit of which the same light that bathed the chimneys of the houses was ripening the skin, pink, glowing, melting-soft. But I wished only to consider the eternal significance of the carvings when I recognised the Apostles, which I had seen in casts in the Trocadéro museum, and which on either side of the Virgin, before the deep bay of the porch, were awaiting me as though to do me reverence. With their benign, blunt, mild faces and bowed shoulders they seemed to be advancing upon me with an air of welcome, singing the Alleluia of a fine day. But it was evident that their expression was unchanging as that on a dead man's face, and could be modified only by my turning about to look at them in different aspects. I said to myself: "Here I am: this is the Church of Balbec. This square, which looks as though it were conscious of its glory, is the only place in the world that possesses Balbec Church. All that I have seen so far have been photographs of this church—and of these famous Apostles, this Virgin of the Porch, mere casts only. Now it is the church itself, the statue itself; these are they; they, the unique things—this is something far greater."

It was something less, perhaps, also. As a young man on the day of an examination or of a duel feels the question that he has been asked, the shot that he has fired, to be a very little thing when he thinks of the reserves of knowledge and of valour that he possesses and would like to have displayed, so my mind, which had exalted the Virgin of the Porch far above the reproductions that I had had before my eyes, inaccessible by the vicissitudes which had power to threaten them, intact although they were destroyed, ideal, endowed with universal value, was astonished to see the statue which it had carved a thousand times, reduced now to its own apparent form in stone, occupying, on the radius of my outstretched arm, a place in which it had for rivals an election placard and the point of my stick, fettered to the Square, inseparable from the head of the main street, powerless to hide from the gaze of the Café and of the omnibus office, receiving on its face half of that ray of the setting sun (half, presently, in a few hours' time, of the light of the street lamp) of which the Bank building received the other half, tainted simultaneously with that branch office of a money-lending establishment by the smells from the pastry-cook's oven, subjected to the tyranny of the Individual to such a point that, if I had chosen to scribble my name upon that stone, it was she, the illustrious Virgin whom until then I had endowed with a general existence and an intangible beauty, the Virgin of Balbec, the unique (which meant, alas, the only one) who, on her body coated with the same soot as defiled the neighbouring houses, would have displayed—powerless to rid herself of them—to all the admiring strangers come there to gaze upon her, the marks of my piece of chalk and the letters of my name; it was she, indeed, the immortal work of art, so long desired, whom I found, transformed, as was the church itself, into a little old woman in stone whose height I could measure and count her wrinkles. But time was passing; I must return to the station, where I was to wait for my grandmother and Françoise, so that we should all arrive at Balbec-Plage together. I reminded myself of what I had read about Balbec, of Swann's saying: "It is exquisite; as fine as Siena." And casting the blame for my disappointment upon various accidental causes, such as the state of my health, my exhaustion after the journey, my incapacity for looking at things properly, I endeavoured to console myself with the thought that other towns remained still intact for me, that I might soon, perhaps, be making my way, as into a shower of pearls, into the cool pattering sound that dripped from Quimperlé, cross that green water lit by a rosy glow in which Pont-Aven was bathed; but as for Balbec, no sooner had I set foot in it than it was as though I had broken open a name which ought to have been kept hermetically closed, and into which, seizing at once the opportunity that I had imprudently given them when I expelled all the images that had been living in it until then, a tramway, a Café, people crossing the square, the local branch of a Bank, irresistibly propelled by some external pressure, by a pneumatic force, had come crowding into the interior of those two syllables which, closing over them, let them now serve as a border to the porch of the Persian church, and would never henceforward cease to contain them.

In the little train of the local railway company which was to take us to Balbec-Plage I found my grandmother, but found her alone—for, imagining that she was sending Françoise on ahead of her, so as to have everything ready before we arrived, but having mixed up her instructions, she had succeeded only in packing off Françoise in the wrong direction, who at that moment was being carried down all unsuspectingly, at full speed, to Nantes, and would probably wake up next morning at Bordeaux. No sooner had I taken my seat in the carriage, filled with the fleeting light of sunset and with the lingering heat of the afternoon (the former enabling me, alas, to see written clearly upon my grandmother's face how much the latter had tired her), than she began: "Well, and Balbec?" with a smile so brightly illuminated by her expectation of the great pleasure which she supposed me to have been enjoying that I dared not at once confess to her my disappointment. Besides, the impression which my mind had been seeking occupied it steadily less as the place drew nearer to which my body would have to become accustomed. At the end—still more than an hour away—of this journey I was trying to form a picture of the manager of the hotel at Balbec, to whom I, at that moment, did not exist, and I should have liked to be going to present myself to him in more impressive company than that of my grandmother, who would be certain to ask for a reduction of his terms. The only thing positive about him was his haughty condescension; his lineaments were still vague.

Every few minutes the little train brought us to a standstill in one of the stations which came before Balbec-Plage, stations the mere names of which (Incarville, Marcouville, Doville, Pont-à-Couleuvre, Arambouville, Saint-Mars-le-Vieux, Hermonville, Maineville) seemed to me outlandish, whereas if I had come upon them in a book I should at once have been struck by their affinity to the names of certain places in the neighbourhood of Combray. But to the trained ear two musical airs, consisting each of so many notes, several of which are common to them both, will present no similarity whatever if they differ in the colour of their harmony and orchestration. So it was that nothing could have reminded me less than these dreary names, made up of sand, of space too airy and empty and of salt, out of which the termination 'ville' always escaped, as the 'fly' seems to spring out from the end of the word 'butterfly'—nothing could have reminded me less of those other names, Roussainville or Martinville, which, because I had heard them pronounced so often by my great-aunt at table, in the dining-room, had acquired a certain sombre charm in which were blended perhaps extracts of the flavour of 'preserves,' the smell of the fire of logs and of the pages of one of Bergotte's books, the colour of the stony front of the house opposite, all of which things still to-day when they rise like a gaseous bubble from the depths of my memory preserve their own specific virtue through all the successive layers of rival interests which must be traversed before they reach the surface.

These were—commanding the distant sea from the crests of their several dunes or folding themselves already for the night beneath hills of a crude green colour and uncomfortable shape, like that of the sofa in one's bedroom in an hotel at which one has just arrived, each composed of a cluster of villas whose line was extended to include a lawn-tennis court and now and then a casino, over which a flag would be snapping in the freshening breeze, like a hollow cough—a series of watering-places which now let me see for the first time their regular visitors, but let me see only the external features of those visitors—lawn-tennis players in white hats, the station-master spending all his life there on the spot among his tamarisks and roses, a lady in a straw 'boater' who, following the everyday routine of an existence which I should never know, was calling to her dog which had stopped to examine something in the road before going in to her bungalow where the lamp was already lighted for her return—which with these strangely usual and slightingly familiar sights stung my ungreeted eyes and stabbed my exiled heart. But how much were my sufferings increased when we had finally landed in the hall of the Grand Hotel at Balbec, and I stood there in front of the monumental staircase that looked like marble, while my grandmother, regardless of the growing hostility of the strangers among whom we should have to live, discussed 'terms' with the manager, a sort of nodding mandarin whose face and voice were alike covered with scars (left by the excision of countless pustules from one and from the other of the divers accents acquired from an alien ancestry and in a cosmopolitan upbringing) who stood there in a smart dinner-jacket, with the air of an expert psychologist, classifying, whenever the 'omnibus' discharged a fresh load, the 'nobility and gentry' as 'geesers' and the 'hotel crooks' as nobility and gentry. Forgetting, probably, that he himself was not drawing five hundred francs a month, he had a profound contempt for people to whom five hundred francs—or, as he preferred to put it, 'twenty-five louis' was 'a lot of money,' and regarded them as belonging to a race of pariahs for whom the Grand Hotel was certainly not intended. It is true that even within its walls there were people who did not pay very much and yet had not forfeited the manager's esteem, provided that he was assured that they were watching their expenditure not from poverty so much as from avarice. For this could in no way lower their standing since it is a vice and may consequently be found at every grade of social position. Social position was the one thing by which the manager was impressed, social position, or rather the signs which seemed to him to imply that it was exalted, such as not taking one's hat off when one came into the hall, wearing knickerbockers, or an overcoat with a waist, and taking a cigar with a band of purple and gold out of a crushed morocco case—to none of which advantages could I, alas, lay claim. He would also adorn his business conversation with choice expressions, to which, as a rule, he gave a wrong meaning.

While I heard my grandmother, who shewed no sign of annoyance at his listening to her with his hat on his head and whistling through his teeth at her, ask him in an artificial voice, "And what are . . . your charges? . . . Oh! far too high for my little budget," waiting upon a bench, I sought refuge in the innermost depths of my own consciousness, strove to migrate to a plane of eternal thoughts—to leave nothing of myself, nothing that lived and felt on the surface of my body, anaesthetised as are those of animals which by inhibition feign death when they are attacked—so as not to suffer too keenly in this place, with which my total unfamiliarity was made all the more evident to me when I saw the familiarity that seemed at the same moment to be enjoyed by a smartly dressed lady for whom the manager shewed his respect by taking liberties with the little dog that followed her across the hall, the young 'blood' with a feather in his hat who asked, as he came in, 'Any letters?'—all these people to whom it was an act of home-coming to mount those stairs of imitation marble. And at the same time the triple frown of Minos, Æacus and Rhadamanthus (beneath which I plunged my naked soul as into an unknown element where there was nothing now to protect it) was bent sternly upon me by a group of gentlemen who, though little versed perhaps in the art of receiving, yet bore the title 'Reception Clerks,' while beyond them again, through a closed wall of glass, were people sitting in a reading-room for the description of which I should have had to borrow from Dante alternately the colours in which he paints Paradise and Hell, according as I was thinking of the happiness of the elect who had the right to sit and read there undisturbed, or of the terror which my grandmother would have inspired in me if, in her insensibility to this sort of impression, she had asked me to go in there and wait for her by myself.

My sense of loneliness was further increased a moment later: when I had confessed to my grandmother that I did not feel well, that I thought that we should be obliged to return to Paris, she had offered no protest, saying merely that she was going out to buy a few things which would be equally useful whether we left or stayed (and which, I afterwards learned, were all for my benefit, Françoise having gone off with certain articles which I might need); while I waited for her I had taken a turn through the streets, packed with a crowd of people who imparted to them a sort of indoor warmth, streets in which were still open the hairdresser's shop and the pastry-cook's, the latter filled with customers eating ices, opposite the statue of Duguay-Trouin. This crowd gave me just about as much pleasure as a photograph of it in one of the 'illustrateds' might give a patient who was turning its pages in the surgeon's waiting-room. I was astonished to find that there were people so different from myself that this stroll through the town had actually been recommended to me by the manager as a distraction, and also that the torture chamber which a new place of residence is could appear to some people a 'continuous amusement,' to quote the hotel prospectus, which might, it was true, exaggerate, but was, for all that, addressed to a whole army of clients to whose tastes it must appeal. True, it invoked, to make them come to the Grand Hotel, Balbec, not only the 'exquisite fare' and the 'fairy-like view across the Casino gardens,' but also the 'ordinances of her Majesty Queen Fashion, which no one may break with impunity, or without being taken for a Bœotian, a charge that no well-bred man would willingly incur.' The need that I now had of my grandmother was enhanced by my fear that I had shattered another of her illusions. She must be feeling discouraged, feeling that if I could not stand the fatigue of this journey there was no hope that any change of air could ever do me good. I decided to return to the hotel and to wait for her there: the manager himself came forward and pressed a button, and a person whose acquaintance I had not yet made, labelled 'LIFT' (who at that highest point in the building, which corresponded to the lantern in a Norman church, was installed like a photographer in his darkroom or an organist in his loft) came rushing down towards me with the agility of a squirrel, tamed, active, caged. Then, sliding upwards again along a steel pillar, he bore me aloft in his train towards the dome of this temple of Mammon. On each floor, on either side of a narrow communicating stair, opened out fanwise a range of shadowy galleries, along one of which, carrying a bolster, a chambermaid came past. I lent to her face, which the gathering dusk made featureless, the mask of my most impassioned dreams of beauty, but read in her eyes as they turned towards me the horror of my own nonentity. Meanwhile, to dissipate, in the course of this interminable assent, the mortal anguish which I felt in penetrating thus in silence the mystery of this chiaroscuro so devoid of poetry, lighted by a single vertical line of little windows which were those of the solitary water-closet on each landing, I addressed a few words to the young organist, artificer of my journey and my partner in captivity, who continued to manipulate the registers of his instrument and to finger the stops. I apologised for taking up so much room, for giving him so much trouble, and asked whether I was not obstructing him in the practice of an art to which, so as to flatter the performer, I did more than display curiosity, I confessed my strong attachment. But he vouchsafed no answer, whether from astonishment at my words, preoccupation with what he was doing, regard for convention, hardness of hearing, respect for holy ground, fear of danger, slowness of understanding, or by the manager's orders.

There is perhaps nothing that gives us so strong an impression of the reality of the external world as the difference in the positions, relative to ourselves, of even a quite unimportant person before we have met him and after. I was the same man who had taken, that afternoon, the little train from Balbec to the coast, I carried in my body the same consciousness. But on that consciousness, in the place where, at six o'clock, there had been, with the impossibility of forming any idea of the manager, the Grand Hotel or its occupants, a vague and timorous impatience for the moment at which I should reach my destination, were to be found now the pustules excised from the face of the cosmopolitan manager (he was, as a matter of fact, a naturalised Monegasque, although—as he himself put it, for he was always using expressions which he thought distinguished without noticing that they were incorrect—'of Rumanian originality'), his action in ringing for the lift, the lift-boy himself, a whole frieze of puppet-show characters issuing from that Pandora's box which was the Grand Hotel, undeniable, irremovable, and, like everything that is realised, sterilising.

But at least this change, which I had done nothing to bring about, proved to me that something had happened which was external to myself—however devoid of interest that thing might be—and I was like a traveller who, having had the sun in his face when he started, concludes that he has been for so many hours on the road when he finds the sun behind him. I was half dead with exhaustion, I was burning with fever; I would gladly have gone to bed, but I had no night-things. I should have liked at least to lie down for a little while on the bed, but what good would that have done me, seeing that I should not have been able to find any rest there for that mass of sensations which is for each of us his sentient if not his material body, and that the unfamiliar objects which encircled that body, forcing it to set its perceptions on the permanent footing of a vigilant and defensive guard, would have kept my sight, my hearing, all my senses in a position as cramped and comfortless (even if I had stretched out my legs) as that of Cardinal La Balue in the cage in which he could neither stand nor sit. It is our noticing them that puts things in a room, our growing used to them that takes them away again and clears a space for us. Space there was none for me in my bedroom (mine in name only) at Balbec; it was full of things which did not know me, which flung back at me the distrustful look that I had cast at them, and, without taking any heed of my existence, shewed that I was interrupting the course of theirs. The clock—whereas at home I heard my clock tick only a few seconds in a week, when I was coming out of some profound meditation—continued without a moment's interruption to utter, in an unknown tongue, a series of observations which must have been most uncomplimentary to myself, for the violet curtains listened to them without replying, but in an attitude such as people adopt who shrug their shoulders to indicate that the sight of a third person irritates them. They gave to this room with its lofty ceiling a semi-historical character which might have made it a suitable place for the assassination of the Duc de Guise, and afterwards for parties of tourists personally conducted by one of Messrs. Thomas Cook and Son's guides, but for me to sleep in—no. I was tormented by the presence of some little bookcases with glass fronts which ran along the walls, but especially by a large mirror with feet which stood across one corner, for I felt that until it had left the room there would be no possibility of rest for me there. I kept raising my eyes—which the things in my room in Paris disturbed no more than did my eyelids themselves, for they were merely extensions of my organs, an enlargement of myself—towards the fantastically high ceiling of this belvedere planted upon the summit of the hotel which my grandmother had chosen for me; and in that region more intimate than those in which we see and hear, that region in which we test the quality of odours, almost in the very heart of my inmost self, the smell of flowering grasses next launched its offensive against my last feeble line of trenches, where I stood up to it, not without tiring myself still further, with the futile incessant defence of an anxious sniffing. Having no world, no room, no body now that was not menaced by the enemies thronging round me, invaded to the very bones by fever, I was utterly alone; I longed to die. Then my grandmother came in, and to the expansion of my ebbing heart there opened at once an infinity of space.

She was wearing a loose cambric gown which she put on at home whenever any of us was ill (because she felt more comfortable in it, she used to say, for she always ascribed to her actions a selfish motive), and which was, for tending us, for watching by our beds, her servant's livery, her nurse's uniform, her religious habit. But whereas the trouble that servants, nurses, religious take, their kindness to us, the merits that we discover in them and the gratitude that we owe them all go to increase the impression that we have of being, in their eyes, some one different, of feeling that we are alone, keeping in our own hands the control over our thoughts, our will to live, I knew, when I was with my grandmother, that, however great the misery that there was in me, it would be received by her with a pity still more vast; that everything that was mine, my cares, my wishes, would be, in my grandmother, supported upon a desire to save and prolong my life stronger than was my own; and my thoughts were continued in her without having to undergo any deflection, since they passed from my mind into hers without change of atmosphere or of personality. And—like a man who tries to fasten his necktie in front of a glass and forgets that the end which he sees reflected is not on the side to which he raises his hand, or like a dog that chases along the ground the dancing shadow of an insect in the air—misled by her appearance in the body as we are apt to be in this world where we have no direct perception of people's souls, I threw myself into the arms of my grandmother and clung with my lips to her face as though I had access thus to that immense heart which she opened to me. And when I felt my mouth glued to her cheeks, to her brow, I drew from them something so beneficial, so nourishing that I lay in her arms as motionless, as solemn, as calmly gluttonous as a babe at the breast.

At last I let go, and lay and gazed, and could not tire of gazing at her large face, as clear in its outline as a fine cloud, glowing and serene, behind which I could discern the radiance of her tender love. And everything that received, in however slight a degree, any share of her sensations, everything that could be said to belong in any way to her was at once so spiritualised, so sanctified, that with outstretched hands I smoothed her dear hair, still hardly grey, with as much respect, precaution, comfort as if I had actually been touching her goodness. She found a similar pleasure in taking any trouble that saved me one, and in a moment of immobility and rest for my weary limbs something so delicious that when, having seen that she wished to help me with my undressing and to take my boots off, I made as though to stop her and began to undress myself, with an imploring gaze she arrested my hands as they fumbled with the top buttons of my coat and boots.

"Oh, do let me!" she begged. "It is such a joy for your Granny. And be sure you knock on the wall if you want anything in the night. My bed is just on the other side, and the partition is quite thin. Just give a knock now, as soon as you are ready, so that we shall know where we are."

And, sure enough, that evening I gave three knocks—a signal which, the week after, when I was ill, I repeated every morning for several days, because my grandmother wanted me to have some milk early. Then, when I thought that I could hear her stirring, so that she should not be kept waiting but might, the moment she had brought me the milk, go to sleep again, I ventured on three little taps, timidly, faintly, but for all that distinctly, for if I was afraid of disturbing her, supposing that I had been mistaken and that she was still asleep, I should not have wished her either to lie awake listening for a summons which she had not at once caught and which I should not have the courage to repeat. And scarcely had I given my taps than I heard three others, in a different intonation from mine, stamped with a calm authority, repeated twice over so that there should be no mistake, and saying to me plainly: "Don't get excited; I heard you; I shall be with you in a minute!" and shortly afterwards my grandmother appeared. I explained to her that I had been afraid that she would not hear me, or might think that it was some one in the room beyond who was tapping; at which she smiled:

"Mistake my poor chick's knocking for anyone else! Why, Granny could tell it among a thousand! Do you suppose there's anyone else in the world who's such a silly-billy, with such feverish little knuckles, so afraid of waking me up and of not making me understand? Even if he just gave the least scratch, Granny could tell her mouse's sound at once, especially such a poor miserable little mouse as mine is. I could hear it just now, trying to make up its mind, and rustling the bedclothes, and going through all its tricks."

She pushed open the shutters; where a wing of the hotel jutted out at right angles to my window, the sun was already installed upon the roof, like a slater who is up betimes, and starts early and works quietly so as not to rouse the sleeping town, whose stillness seems to enhance his activity. She told me what o'clock, what sort of day it was; that it was not worth while my getting up and coming to the window, that there was a mist over the sea; if the baker's shop had opened yet; what the vehicle was that I could hear passing. All that brief, trivial curtain-raiser, that negligible *introit* of a new day, performed without any spectator, a little scrap of life which was only for our two selves, which I should have no hesitation in repeating, later on, to Françoise or even to strangers, speaking of the fog 'which you could have cut with a knife" at six o'clock that morning, with the ostentation of one who was boasting not of a piece of knowledge that he had acquired but of a mark of affection shewn to himself alone; dear morning moment, opened like a symphony by the rhythmical dialogue of my three taps, to which the thin wall of my bedroom, steeped in love and joy, grown melodious, immaterial, singing like the angelic choir, responded with three other taps, eagerly awaited, repeated once and again, in which it contrived to waft to me the soul of my grandmother, whole and perfect, and the promise of her coming, with a swiftness of annunciation and melodic accuracy. But on this first night after our arrival, when my grandmother had left me, I began again to feel as I had felt, the day before, in Paris, at the moment of leaving home. Perhaps this fear that I had—and shared with so many of my fellow-men—of sleeping in a strange room, perhaps this fear is only the most humble, obscure, organic, almost unconscious form of that great and desperate resistance set up by the things that constitute the better part of our present life towards our mentally assuming, by accepting it as true, the formula of a future in which those things are to have no part; a resistance which was at the root of the horror that I had so often been made to feel by the thought that my parents must, one day, die, that the stern necessity of life might oblige me to live remote from Gilberte, or simply to settle permanently in a place where I should never see any of my old friends; a resistance which was also at the root of the difficulty that I found in imagining my own death, or a survival such as Bergotte used to promise to mankind in his books, a survival in which I should not be allowed to take with me my memories, my frailties, my character, which did not easily resign themselves to the idea of ceasing to be, and desired for me neither annihilation nor an eternity in which they would have no part.

When Swann had said to me, in Paris one day when I felt particularly unwell: "You ought to go off to one of those glorious islands in the Pacific; you'd never come back again if you did." I should have liked to answer: "But then I shall not see your daughter any more; I shall be living among people and things she has never seen." And yet my better judgment whispered: "What difference can that make, since you are not going to be affected by it? When M. Swann tells you that you will not come back he means by that that you will not want to come back, and if you don't want to that is because you will be happier out there." For my judgment was aware that Habit—Habit which was even now setting to work to make me like this unfamiliar lodging, to change the position of the mirror, the shade of the curtains, to stop the clock—undertakes as well to make dear to us the companions whom at first we disliked, to give another appearance to their faces, to make attractive the sound of their voices, to modify the inclinations of their hearts. It is true that these new friendships for places and people are based upon forgetfulness of the old; but what my better judgment was thinking was simply that I could look without apprehension along the vista of a life in which I should be for ever separated from people all memory of whom I should lose, and it was by way of consolation that my mind was offering to my heart a promise of oblivion which succeeded only in sharpening the edge of its despair. Not that the heart also is not bound in time, when separation is complete, to feel the anodyne effect of habit; but until then it will continue to suffer. And our dread of a future in which we must forego the sight of faces, the sound of voices that we love, friends from whom we derive to-day our keenest joys, this dread, far from being dissipated, is intensified, if to the grief of such a privation we reflect that there will be added what seems to us now in anticipation an even more cruel grief; not to feel it as a grief at all—to remain indifferent; for if that should occur, our ego would have changed, it would then be not merely the attractiveness of our family, our mistress, our friends that had ceased to environ us, but our affection for them; it would have been so completely eradicated from our heart, in which to-day it is a conspicuous element, that we should be able to enjoy that life apart from them the very thought of which to-day makes us recoil in horror; so that it would be in a real sense the death of ourselves, a death followed, it is true, by resurrection but in a different ego, the life, the love of which are beyond the reach of those elements of the existing ego that are doomed to die. It is they—even the meanest of them, such as our obscure attachments to the dimensions, to the atmosphere of a bedroom—that grow stubborn and refuse, in acts of rebellion which we must recognise to be a secret, partial, tangible and true aspect of our resistance to death, of the long resistance, desperate and daily renewed, to a fragmentary and gradual death such as interpolates itself throughout the whole course of our life, tearing away from us at every moment a shred of ourselves, dead matter on which new cells will multiply, and grow. And for a neurotic nature such as mine, one that is to say in which the intermediaries, the nerves, perform their functions badly—fail to arrest on its way to the consciousness, allow indeed to penetrate there, distinct, exhausting, innumerable, agonising, the plaint of those most humble elements of the personality which are about to disappear—the anxiety and alarm which I felt as I lay outstretched beneath that strange and too lofty ceiling were but the protest of an affection that survived in me for a ceiling that was familiar and low. Doubtless this affection too would disappear, and another have taken its place (when death, and then another life, would, in the guise of Habit, have performed their double task); but until its annihilation, every night it would suffer afresh, and on this first night especially, confronted with a future already realised in which there would no longer be any place for it, it rose in revolt, it tortured me with the sharp sound of its lamentations whenever my straining eyes, powerless to turn from what was wounding them, endeavoured to fasten their gaze upon that inaccessible ceiling.

But next morning!—after a servant had come to call me, and had brought me hot water, and while I was washing and dressing myself and trying in vain to find the things that I wanted in my trunk, from which I extracted, pell-mell, only a lot of things that were of no use whatever, what a joy it was to me, thinking already of the delights of luncheon and of a walk along the shore, to see in the window, and in all the glass fronts of the bookcases as in the portholes of a ship's cabin, the open sea, naked, unshadowed, and yet with half of its expanse in shadow, bounded by a thin and fluctuant line, and to follow with my eyes the waves that came leaping towards me, one behind another, like divers along a springboard. Every other moment, holding in one hand the starched, unyielding towel, with the name of the hotel printed upon it, with which I was making futile efforts to dry myself, I returned to the window to gaze once more upon that vast amphitheatre, dazzling, mountainous, and upon the snowy crests of its emerald waves, here and there polished and translucent, which with a placid violence, a leonine bending of the brows, let their steep fronts, to which the sun now added a smile without face or features, run forward to their goal, totter and melt and be no more. Window in which I was, henceforward, to plant myself every morning, as at the pane of a mail coach in which one has slept, to see whether, in the night, a long sought mountain-chain has come nearer or withdrawn—only here it was those hills of the sea which, before they come dancing back towards us, are apt to retire so far that often it was only at the end of a long and sandy plain that I would distinguish, miles it seemed away, their first undulations upon a background transparent, vaporous, bluish, like the glaciers that one sees in the backgrounds of the Tuscan Primitives. On other mornings it was quite close at hand that the sun was smiling upon those waters of a green as tender as that preserved in Alpine pastures (among mountains on which the sun spreads himself here and there like a lazy giant who may at any moment come leaping gaily down their craggy sides) less by the moisture of their soil than by the liquid mobility of their light. Anyhow, in that breach which shore and water between them drive through all the rest of the world, for the passage, the accumulation there of light, it is light above all, according to the direction from which it comes and along which our eyes follow it, it is light that shifts and fixes the undulations of the sea. Difference of lighting modifies no less the orientation of a place, constructs no less before our eyes new goals which it inspires in us the yearning to attain, than would a distance in space actually traversed in the course of a long journey. When, in the morning, the sun came from behind the hotel, disclosing to me the sands bathed in light as far as the first bastions of the sea, it seemed to be shewing me another side of the picture, and to be engaging me in the pursuit, along the winding path of its rays, of a journey motionless but ever varied amid all the fairest scenes of the diversified landscape of the hours. And on this first morning the sun pointed out to me far off with a jovial finger those blue peaks of the sea, which bear no name upon any geographer's chart, until, dizzy with its sublime excursion over the thundering and chaotic surface of their crests and avalanches, it came back to take shelter from the wind in my bedroom, swaggering across the unmade bed and scattering its riches over the splashed surface of the basin-stand, and into my open trunk, where by its very splendour and ill-matched luxury it added still further to the general effect of disorder. Alas, that wind from the sea; an hour later, in the great dining-room—while we were having our luncheon, and from the leathern gourd of a lemon were sprinkling a few golden drops on to a pair of soles which presently left on our plates the plumes of their picked skeletons, curled like stiff feathers and resonant as citherns,—it seemed to my grandmother a cruel deprivation not to be able to feel its life-giving breath on her cheek, on account of the window, transparent but closed, which like the front of a glass case in a museum divided us from the beach while allowing us to look out upon its whole extent, and into which the sky entered so completely that its azure had the effect of being the colour of the windows and its white clouds only so many flaws in the glass. Imagining that I was 'seated upon the mole' or at rest in the 'boudoir' of which Baudelaire speaks I asked myself whether his 'Sun's rays upon the sea' were not—a very different thing from the evening ray, simple and superficial as the wavering stroke of a golden pencil—just what at that moment was scorching the sea topaz-brown, fermenting it, turning it pale and milky like foaming beer, like milk, while now and then there hovered over it great blue shadows which some god seemed, for his pastime, to be shifting to and fro by moving a mirror in the sky. Unfortunately, it was not only in its outlook that it differed from our room at Combray, giving upon the houses over the way, this dining-room at Balbec, bare-walled, filled with a sunlight green as the water in a marble font, while a few feet away the full tide and broad daylight erected as though before the gates of the heavenly city an indestructible and moving rampart of emerald and gold. At Combray, since we were known to everyone, I took heed of no one. In life at the seaside one knows only one's own party. I was not yet old enough, I was still too sensitive to have outgrown the desire to find favour in the sight of other people and to possess their hearts. Nor had I acquired the more noble indifference which a man of the world would have felt, with regard to the people who were eating their luncheon in the room, nor to the boys and girls who strolled past the window, with whom I was pained by the thought that I should never be allowed to go on expeditions, though not so much pained as if my grandmother, contemptuous of social formalities and concerned about nothing but my health, had gone to them with the request, humiliating for me to overhear, that they would consent to let me accompany them. Whether they were returning to some villa beyond my ken, or had emerged from it, racquet in hand, on their way to some lawn-tennis court, or were mounted on horses whose hooves trampled and tore my heart, I gazed at them with a passionate curiosity, in that blinding light of the beach by which social distinctions are altered, I followed all their movements through the transparency of that great bay of glass which allowed so much light to flood the room. But it intercepted the wind, and this seemed wrong to my grandmother, who, unable to endure the thought that I was losing the benefit of an hour in the open air, surreptitiously unlatched a pane and at once set flying, with the bills of fare, the newspapers, veils and hats of all the people at the other tables; she herself, fortified by the breath of heaven, remained calm and smiling like Saint Blandina, amid the torrent of invective which, increasing my sense of isolation and misery, those scornful, dishevelled, furious visitors combined to pour on us.

To a certain extent—and this, at Balbec, gave to the population, as a rule monotonously rich and cosmopolitan, of that sort of smart and 'exclusive' hotel, a quite distinctive local character—they were composed of eminent persons from the departmental capitals of that region of France, a chief magistrate from Caen, a leader of the Cherbourg bar, a big solicitor from Le Mans, who annually, when the holidays came round, starting from the various points over which, throughout the working year, they were scattered like snipers in a battle or draughtsmen upon a board, concentrated their forces upon this hotel. They always reserved the same rooms, and with their wives, who had pretensions to aristocracy, formed a little group, which was joined by a leading barrister and a leading doctor from Paris, who on the day of their departure would say to the others:

"Oh, yes, of course; you don't go by our train. You are fortunate, you will be home in time for luncheon."

"Fortunate, do you say? You, who live in the Capital, in 'Paris, the great town,' while I have to live in a wretched county town of a hundred thousand souls (it is true, we managed to muster a hundred and two thousand at the last census, but what is that compared to your two and a half millions?) going back, too, to asphalt streets and all the bustle and gaiety of Paris life?"

They said this with a rustic burring of their r's, but without bitterness, for they were leading lights each in his own province, who could like other people have gone to Paris had they chosen—the chief magistrate of Caen had several times been offered a judgeship in the Court of Appeal—but had preferred to stay where they were, from love of their native towns or of obscurity or of fame, or because they were reactionaries, and enjoyed being on friendly terms with the country houses of the neighbourhood. Besides several of them were not going back at once to their county towns.

For—inasmuch as the Bay of Balbec was a little world apart in the midst of a great world, a basketful of the seasons in which were clustered in a ring good days and bad, and the months in their order, so that not only, on days when one could make out Rivebelle, which was in itself a sign of coming storms, could one see the sunlight on the houses there while Balbec was plunged in darkness, but later on, when the cold weather had reached Balbec, one could be certain of finding on that opposite shore two or three supplementary months of warmth—those of the regular visitors to the Grand Hotel whose holidays began late or lasted long, gave orders, when rain and fog came and Autumn was in the air, for their boxes to be packed and embarked, and set sail across the Bay to find summer again at Rivebelle or Costedor. This little group in the Balbec hotel looked with distrust upon each new arrival, and while affecting to take not the least interest in him, hastened, all of them, to ply with questions their friend the head waiter. For it was the same head waiter—Aimé—who returned every year for the season, and kept their tables for them; and their good ladies, having heard that his wife was 'expecting,' would sit after meals working each at one of the 'little things,' stopping only to put up their glasses and stare at us, my grandmother and myself, because we were eating hard-boiled eggs in salad, which was considered common, and was, in fact, 'not done' in the best society of Alençon. They affected an attitude of contemptuous irony with regard to a Frenchman who was called 'His Majesty' and had indeed proclaimed himself King of a small island in the South Seas, inhabited by a few savages. He was staying in the hotel with his pretty mistress, whom, as she crossed the beach to bathe, the little boys would greet with "Three cheers for the Queen!" because she would reward them with a shower of small silver. The chief magistrate and the barrister went so far as to pretend not to see her, and if any of their friends happened to look at her, felt bound to warn him that she was only a little shop-girl.

"But I was told that at Ostend they used the royal bathing machine."

"Well, and why not? It's on hire for twenty francs. You can take it yourself, if you care for that sort of thing. Anyhow, I know for a fact that the fellow asked for an audience, when he was there, with the King, who sent back word that he took no cognisance of any Pantomime Princes."

"Really, that's interesting! What queer people there are in the world, to be sure!"

And I dare say it was all quite true: but it was also from resentment of the thought that, to many of their fellow-visitors, they were themselves simply respectable but rather common people who did not know this King and Queen so prodigal with their small change, that the solicitor, the magistrate, the barrister, when what they were pleased to call the 'Carnival' went by, felt so much annoyance, and expressed aloud an indignation that was quite understood by their friend the head waiter who, obliged to shew proper civility to these generous if not authentic Sovereigns, still, while he took their orders, would dart from afar at his old patrons a covert but speaking glance. Perhaps there was also something of the same resentment at being erroneously supposed to be less and unable to explain that they were more smart, underlining the 'fine specimen' with which they qualified a young 'blood,' the consumptive and dissipated son of an industrial magnate, who appeared every day in a new suit of clothes with an orchid in his buttonhole, drank champagne at luncheon, and then strolled out of the hotel, pale, impassive, a smile of complete indifference on his lips, to the casino to throw away at the baccarat table enormous sums, 'which he could ill afford to lose,' as the solicitor said with a resigned air to the chief magistrate, whose wife had it 'on good authority' that this 'detrimental' young man was bringing his parents' grey hair in sorrow to the grave.

On the other hand, the barrister and his friends could not exhaust their flow of sarcasm on the subject of a wealthy old lady of title, because she never moved anywhere without taking her whole household with her. Whenever the wives of the solicitor and the magistrate saw her in the dining-room at meal-times they put up their glasses and gave her an insolent scrutiny, as minute and distrustful as if she had been some dish with a pretentious name but a suspicious appearance which, after the negative result of a systematic study, must be sent away with a lofty wave of the hand and a grimace of disgust.

No doubt by this behaviour they meant only to shew that, if there were things in the world which they themselves lacked—in this instance, certain prerogatives which the old lady enjoyed, and the privilege of her acquaintance—it was not because they could not, but because they did not choose to acquire them. But they had succeeded in convincing themselves that this really was what they felt; and it was the suppression of all desire for, of all curiosity as to forms of life which were unfamiliar, of all hope of pleasing new people (for which, in the women, had been substituted a feigned contempt, an artificial brightness) that had the awkward result of obliging them to label their discontent satisfaction, and lie everlastingly to themselves, for which they were greatly to be pitied. But everyone else in the hotel was no doubt behaving in a similar fashion, though his behaviour might take a different form, and sacrificing, if not to self-importance, at any rate to certain inculcated principles and mental habits the thrilling delight of mixing in a strange kind of life. Of course, the atmosphere of the microcosm in which the old lady isolated herself was not poisoned with virulent bitterness, as was that of the group in which the wives of the solicitor and magistrate sat chattering with impotent rage. It was indeed embalmed with a delicate and old-world fragrance which, however, was none the less artificial. For at heart the old lady would probably have found in attracting, in attaching to herself (and, with that object, recreating herself), the mysterious sympathy of new friends a charm which is altogether lacking from the pleasure that is to be derived from mixing only with the people of one's own world, and reminding oneself that, one's own being the best of all possible worlds, the ill-informed contempt of 'outsiders' may be disregarded. Perhaps she felt that—were she to arrive *incognito* at the Grand Hotel, Balbec, she would, in her black stuff gown and old-fashioned bonnet, bring a smile to the lips of some old reprobate, who from the depths of his rocking chair would glance up and murmur, "What a scarecrow!" or, still worse, to those of some man of repute who had, like the magistrate, kept between his pepper-and-salt whiskers a rosy complexion and a pair of sparkling eyes such as she liked to see, and would at once bring the magnifying lens of the conjugal glasses to bear upon so quaint a phenomenon; and perhaps it was in unconfessed dread of those first few minutes, which, though one knows that they will be but a few minutes, are none the less terrifying, like the first plunge of one's head under water, that this old lady sent down in advance a servant, who would inform the hotel of the personality and habits of his mistress, and, cutting short the manager's greetings, made, with an abruptness in which there was more timidity than pride, for her room, where her own curtains, substituted for those that draped the hotel windows, her own screens and photographs, set up so effectively between her and the outside world, to which otherwise she would have had to adapt herself, the barrier of her private life that it was her home (in which she had comfortably stayed) that travelled rather than herself.

Thenceforward, having placed between herself, on the one hand, and the staff of the hotel and its decorators on the other the servants who bore instead of her the shock of contact with all this strange humanity, and kept up around their mistress her familiar atmosphere, having set her prejudices between herself and the other visitors, indifferent whether or not she gave offence to people whom her friends would not have had in their houses, it was in her own world that she continued to live, by correspondence with her friends, by memories, by her intimate sense of and confidence in her own position, the quality of her manners, the competence of her politeness. And every day, when she came downstairs to go for a drive in her own carriage, the lady's-maid who came after her carrying her wraps, the footman who preceded her, seemed like sentries who, at the gate of an embassy, flying the flag of the country to which she belonged, assured to her upon foreign soil the privilege of extra-territoriality. She did not leave her room until late in the afternoon on the day following our arrival, so that we did not see her in the dining-room, into which the manager, since we were strangers there, conducted us, taking us under his wing, as a corporal takes a squad of recruits to the master-tailor, to have them fitted; we did see however, a moment later, a country gentleman and his daughter, of an obscure but very ancient Breton family, M. and Mlle. de Stermaria, whose table had been allotted to us, in the belief that they had gone out and would not be back until the evening. Having come to Balbec only to see various country magnates whom they knew in that neighbourhood, they spent in the hotel dining-room, what with the invitations they accepted and the visits they paid, only such time as was strictly unavoidable. It was their stiffness that preserved them intact from all human sympathy, from interesting at all the strangers seated round about them, among whom M. de Stermaria kept up the glacial, preoccupied, distant, rude, punctilious and distrustful air that we assume in a railway refreshment-room, among fellow-passengers whom we have never seen before and will never see again, and with whom we can conceive of no other relations than to defend from their onslaught our 'portion' of cold chicken and our corner seat in the train. No sooner had we begun our luncheon than we were asked to leave the table, on the instructions of M. de Stermaria who had just arrived and, without the faintest attempt at an apology to us, requested the head waiter, in our hearing, to "see that such a mistake did not occur again," for it was repugnant to him that "people whom he did not know" should have taken his table.

And certainly into the feeling which impelled a young actress (better known, though, for her smart clothes, her smart sayings, her collection of German porcelain, than in the occasional parts that she had played at the Odéon), her lover, an immensely rich young man for whose sake she had acquired her culture, and two sprigs of aristocracy at that time much in the public eye to form a little band apart, to travel only together, to come down to luncheon—when at Balbec—very late, after everyone had finished; to spend the whole day in their sitting-room playing cards, there entered no sort of ill-humour against the rest of us but simply the requirements of the taste that they had formed for a certain type of conversation, for certain refinements of good living, which made them find pleasure in spending their time, in taking their meals only by themselves, and would have rendered intolerable a life in common with people who had not been initiated into those mysteries. Even at a dinner or a card table, each of them had to be certain that, in the diner or partner who sat opposite to him, there was, latent and not yet made use of, a certain brand of knowledge which would enable him to identify the rubbish with which so many houses in Paris were littered as genuine mediaeval or renaissance 'pieces' and, whatever the subject of discussion, to apply the critical standards common to all their party whereby they distinguished good work from bad. Probably it was only—at such moments—by some infrequent, amusing interruption flung into the general silence of meal or game, or by the new and charming frock which the young actress had put on for luncheon or for poker, that the special kind of existence in which these four friends desired, above all things, to remain plunged was made apparent. But by engulfing them thus in a system of habits which they knew by heart it sufficed to protect them from the mystery of the life that was going on all round them. All the long afternoon, the sea was suspended there before their eyes only as a canvas of attractive colouring might hang on the wall of a wealthy bachelor's flat and it was only in the intervals between the 'hands' that one of the players, finding nothing better to do, raised his eyes to it to seek from it some indication of the weather or the time, and to remind the others that tea was ready. And at night they did not dine in the hotel, where, hidden springs of electricity flooding the great dining-room with light, it became as it were an immense and wonderful aquarium against whose wall of glass the working population of Balbec, the fishermen and also the tradesmen's families, clustering invisibly in the outer darkness, pressed their faces to watch, gently floating upon the golden eddies within, the luxurious life of its occupants, a thing as extraordinary to the poor as the life of strange fishes or molluscs (an important social question, this: whether the wall of glass will always protect the wonderful creatures at their feasting, whether the obscure folk who watch them hungrily out of the night will not break in some day to gather them from their aquarium and devour them). Meanwhile there may have been, perhaps, among the gazing crowd, a motionless, formless mass there in the dark, some writer, some student of human ichthyology who, as he watched the jaws of old feminine monstrosities close over a mouthful of food which they proceeded then to absorb, was amusing himself by classifying them according to their race, by their innate characteristics as well as by those acquired characteristics which bring it about that an old Serbian lady whose buccal protuberance is that of a great sea-fish, because from her earliest years she has moved in the fresh waters of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, eats her salad for all the world like a La Rochefoucauld.

At that hour one could see the three young men in dinner-jackets, waiting for the young woman, who was as usual late but presently, wearing a dress that was almost always different and one of a series of scarves, chosen to gratify some special instinct in her lover, after having from her landing rung for the lift, would emerge from it like a doll coming out of its box. And then all four, because they found that the international phenomenon of the 'Palace,' planted on Balbec soil, had blossomed there in material splendour rather than in food that was fit to eat, bundled into a carriage and went to dine, a mile off, in a little restaurant that was well spoken of, where they held with the cook himself endless discussions of the composition of their meal and the cooking of its various dishes. During their drive, the road bordered with apple-trees that led out of Balbec was no more to them than the distance that must be traversed—barely distinguishable in the darkness from that which separated their homes in Paris from the Café Anglais or the Tour d'Argent—before they could arrive at the fashionable little restaurant where, while the young man's friends envied him because he had such a smartly dressed mistress, the latter's scarves were spread about the little company like a fragrant, flowing veil, but one that kept it apart from the outer world.

Alas for my peace of mind, I had none of the detachment that all these people shewed. To many of them I gave constant thought; I should have liked not to pass unobserved by a man with a receding brow and eyes that dodged between the blinkers of his prejudices and his education, the great nobleman of the district, who was none other than the brother-in-law of

Legrandin, and came every now and then to see somebody at Balbec and on Sundays, by reason of the weekly garden-party that his wife and he gave, robbed the hotel of a large number of its occupants, because one or two of them were invited to these entertainments and the others, so as not to appear to have been not invited, chose that day for an expedition to some distant spot. He had had, as it happened, an exceedingly bad reception at the hotel on the first day of the season, when the staff, freshly imported from the Riviera, did not yet know who or what he was. Not only was he not wearing white flannels, but, with old-fashioned French courtesy and in his ignorance of the ways of smart hotels, on coming into the hall in which there were ladies sitting, he had taken off his hat at the door, the effect of which had been that the manager did not so much as raise a finger to his own in acknowledgment, concluding that this must be some one of the most humble extraction, what he called 'sprung from the ordinary.' The solicitor's wife, alone, had felt herself attracted by the stranger, who exhaled all the starched vulgarity of the really respectable, and had declared, with the unerring discernment and the indisputable authority of a person from whom the highest society of Le Mans held no secrets, that one could see at a glance that one was in the presence of a gentleman of great distinction, of perfect breeding, a striking contrast to the sort of people one usually saw at Balbec, whom she condemned as impossible to know so long as she did not know them. This favourable judgment which she had pronounced on Legrandin's brother-in-law was based perhaps on the spiritless appearance of a man about whom there was nothing to intimidate anyone; perhaps also she had recognised in this gentleman farmer with the gait of a sacristan the Masonic signs of her own inveterate clericalism.

It made no difference my knowing that the young fellows who went past the hotel every day on horseback were the sons of the questionably solvent proprietor of a linen-drapery to whom my father would never have dreamed of speaking; the glamour of 'seaside life' exalted them in my eyes to equestrian statues of demi-gods, and the best thing that I could hope for was that they would never allow their proud gaze to fall upon the wretched boy who was myself, who left the hotel dining-room only to sit humbly upon the sands. I should have been glad to arouse some response even from the adventurer who had been king of a desert island in the South Seas, even of the young consumptive, of whom I liked to think that he was hiding beneath his insolent exterior a shy and tender heart, which would perhaps have lavished on me, and on me alone, the treasures of its affection. Besides (unlike what one generally says of the people one meets when travelling) just as being seen in certain company can invest us, in a watering-place to which we shall return another year, with a coefficient that has no equivalent in our true social life, so there is nothing—not which we keep so resolutely at a distance, but—which we cultivate with such assiduity after our return to Paris as the friendships that we have formed by the sea. I was anxious about the opinion that might be held of me by all these temporary or local celebrities whom my tendency to put myself in the place of other people and to reconstruct what was in their minds had made me place not in their true rank, that which they would have held in Paris, for instance, and which would have been quite low, but in that which they must imagine to be, and which indeed was their rank at Balbec, where the want of a common denominator gave them a sort of relative superiority and an individual interest. Alas, none of these people's contempt for me was so unbearable as that of M. de Stermaria.

For I had noticed his daughter, the moment she came into the room, her pretty features, her pallid, almost blue complexion, what there was peculiar in the carriage of her tall figure, in her gait, which suggested to me—and rightly—her long descent, her aristocratic upbringing, all the more vividly because I knew her name, like those expressive themes composed by musicians of genius which paint in splendid colours the glow of fire, the rush of water, the peace of fields and woods, to audiences who, having first let their eyes run over the programme, have their imaginations trained in the right direction. The label 'Centuries of Breeding,' by adding to Mlle. de Stermaria's charms the idea of their origin, made them more desirable also, advertising their rarity as a high price enhances the value of a thing that has already taken our fancy. And its stock of heredity gave to her complexion, in which so many selected juices had been blended, the savour of an exotic fruit or of a famous vintage.

And then mere chance put into our hands, my grandmother's and mine, the means of giving ourselves an immediate distinction in the eyes of all the other occupants of the hotel. On that first afternoon, at the moment when the old lady came downstairs from her room, producing, thanks to the footman who preceded her, the maid who came running after her with a book and a rug that had been left behind, a marked effect upon all who beheld her and arousing in each of them a curiosity from which it was evident that none was so little immune as M. de Stermaria, the manager leaned across to my grandmother and, from pure kindness of heart (as one might point out the Shah, or Queen Ranavalo to an obscure onlooker who could obviously have no sort of connexion with so mighty a potentate, but might be interested, all the same, to know that he had been standing within a few feet of one) whispered in her ear, "The Marquise de Villeparisis!" while at the same moment the old lady, catching sight of my grandmother, could not repress a start of pleased surprise.

It may be imagined that the sudden appearance, in the guise of a little old woman, of the most powerful of fairies would not have given me so much pleasure, destitute as I was of any means of access to Mlle. de Stermaria, in a strange place where I knew no one: no one, that is to say, for any practical purpose. Aesthetically the number of types of humanity is so restricted that we must constantly, wherever we may be, have the pleasure of seeing people we know, even without looking for them in the works of the old masters, like Swann. Thus it happened that in the first few days of our visit to Balbec I had succeeded in finding Legrandin, Swann's hall porter and Mme. Swann herself, transformed into a waiter, a foreign visitor whom I never saw again and a bathing superintendent. And a sort of magnetism attracts and retains so inseparably, one after another, certain characteristics, facial and mental, that when nature thus introduces a person into a new body she does not mutilate him unduly. Legrandin turned waiter kept intact his stature, the outline of his nose, part of his chin; Mme. Swann, in the masculine gender and the calling of a bathing superintendent, had been accompanied not only by familiar features, but even by the way she had of speaking. Only, she could be of little if any more use to me, standing upon the beach there in the red sash of her office, and hoisting at the first gust of wind the flag which forbade us to bathe (for these superintendents are prudent men, and seldom know how to swim) than she would have been in that fresco of the *Life of Moses* in which Swann had long ago identified her in the portrait of Jethro's Daughter. Whereas this Mme. de Villeparisis was her real self, she had not been the victim of an enchantment which had deprived her of her power, but was capable, on the contrary, of putting at the service of my power an enchantment which would multiply it an hundredfold, and thanks to which, as though I had been swept through the air on the wings of a fabulous bird, I was to cross in a few moments the infinitely wide (at least, at Balbec) social gulf which separated me from Mlle. de Stermaria.

Unfortunately, if there was one person in the world who, more than anyone else, lived shut up in a little world of her own, it was my grandmother. She would not, indeed, have despised me, she would simply not have understood what I meant had she been told that I attached importance to the opinions, that I felt an interest in the persons of people the very existence of whom she had never noticed and would, when the time came to leave Balbec, retain no impression of their names. I dared not confess to her that if these same people had seen her talking to Mme. de Villeparisis, I should have been immensely gratified, because I felt that the Marquise counted for much in the hotel and that her friendship would have given us a position in the eyes of Mlle. de Stermaria. Not that my grandmother's friend represented to me, in any sense of the word, a member of the aristocracy: I was too well used to her name, which had been familiar to my ears before my mind had begun to consider it, when as a child I had heard it occur in conversation at home: while her title added to it only a touch of quaintness—as some uncommon Christian name would have done, or as in the names of streets, among which we can see nothing more noble in the Rue Lord Byron, in the plebeian and even squalid Rue Rochechouart, or in the Rue Grammont than in the Rue Léonce Reynaud or the Rue Hyppolyte Lebas. Mme. de Villeparisis no more made me think of a person who belonged to a special world than did her cousin MacMahon, whom I did not clearly distinguish from M. Carnot, likewise President of the Republic, or from Raspail, whose photograph Françoise had bought with that of Pius IX. It was one of my grandmother's principles that, when away from home, one should cease to have any social intercourse, that one did not go to the seaside to meet people, having plenty of time for that sort of thing in Paris, that they would make one waste on being merely polite, in pointless conversation, the precious time which ought all to be spent in the open air, beside the waves; and finding it convenient to assume that this view was shared by everyone else, and that it authorised, between old friends whom chance brought face to face in the same hotel, the fiction of a mutual *incognito,* on hearing her friend's name from the manager she merely looked the other way, and pretended not to see Mme. de Villeparisis, who, realising that my grandmother did not want to be recognised, looked also into the void. She went past, and I was left in my isolation like a shipwrecked mariner who has seen a vessel apparently coming towards him which has then, without lowering a boat, vanished under the horizon.

She, too, had her meals in the dining-room, but at the other end of it. She knew none of the people who were staying in the hotel, or who came there to call, not even M. de Cambremer; in fact, I noticed that he gave her no greeting, one day when, with his wife, he had accepted an invitation to take luncheon with the barrister, who drunken with the honour of having the nobleman at his table avoided his friends of every day, and confined himself to a distant twitch of the eyelid, so as to draw their attention to this historic event but so discreetly that his signal could not be interpreted by them as an invitation to join the party.

"Well, I hope you've got on your best clothes; I hope you feel smart enough," was the magistrate's wife's greeting to him that evening.

"Smart? Why should I?" asked the barrister, concealing his rapture in an exaggerated astonishment. "Because of my guests, do you mean?" he went on, feeling that it was impossible to keep up the farce any longer. "But what is there smart about having a few friends in to luncheon? After all, they must feed somewhere!"

"But it is smart! They are the *de* Cambremers, aren't they? I recognized them at once. She is a Marquise. And quite genuine, too. Not through the females."

"Oh, she's a very simple soul, she is charming, no stand-offishness about her. I thought you were coming to join us. I was making signals to you. . . I would have introduced you!" he asserted, tempering with a hint of irony the vast generosity of the offer, like Ahasuerus when he says to Esther:

Of all my Kingdom must I give you half!

"No, no, no, no! We lie hidden, like the modest violet."

"But you were quite wrong, I assure you," replied the barrister, growing bolder now that the danger point was passed. "They weren't going to eat you. I say, aren't we going to have our little game of bezique?"

"Why, of course! We were afraid to suggest it, now that you go about entertaining Marquises."

"Oh, get along with you; there's nothing so very wonderful about them. Why, I'm dining there to-morrow. Would you care to go instead of me? I mean it. Honestly, I'd just as soon stay here."

"No, no! I should be removed from the bench as a Reactionary," cried the chief magistrate, laughing till the tears stood in his eyes at his own joke. "But you go to Féterne too, don't you?" he went on, turning to the solicitor.

"Oh, I go there on Sundays—in at one door and out at the other. But I don't have them here to luncheon, like the Leader."

M. de Stermaria was not at Balbec that day, to the barrister's great regret. But he managed to say a word in season to the head waiter:

"Aimé, you can tell M. de Stermaria that he's not the only nobleman you've had in here. You saw the gentleman who was with me to-day at luncheon? Eh? A small moustache, looked like a military man. Well, that was the Marquis de Cambremer!"

"Was it indeed? I'm not surprised to hear it."

"That will shew him that he's not the only man who's got a title. That will teach him! It's not a bad thing to take 'em down a peg or two, those noblemen. I say, Aimé, don't say anything to him unless you like: I mean to say, it's no business of mine; besides, they know each other already."

And next day M. de Stermaria, who remembered that the barrister had once held a brief for one of his friends, came up and introduced himself.

"Our friends in common, the de Cambremers, were anxious that we should meet; the days didn't fit; I don't know quite what went wrong—" stammered the barrister, who, like most liars, imagined that other people do not take the trouble to investigate an unimportant detail which, for all that, may be sufficient (if chance puts you in possession of the humble facts of the case, and they contradict it) to shew the liar in his true colours and to inspire a lasting mistrust.

Then as at all times, but more easily now that her father had left her and was talking to the barrister, I was gazing at Mlle. de Stermaria. No less than the bold and always graceful originality of her attitudes, as when, leaning her elbows on the table, she raised her glass in both hands over her outstretched arms, the dry flame of a glance at once extinguished, the ingrained, congenital hardness that one could feel, ill-concealed by her own personal inflexions, in the sound of her voice, which had shocked my grandmother; a sort of atavistic starting point to which she recoiled whenever, by glance or utterance, she had succeeded in expressing a thought of her own; all of these qualities carried the mind of him who watched her back to the line of ancestors who had bequeathed to her that inadequacy of human sympathy, those blanks in her sensibility, that short measure of humanity which was at every moment running out. But from a certain look which flooded for a moment the wells—instantly dry again—of her eyes, a look in which I could discern that almost obsequious docility which the predominance of a taste for sensual pleasures gives to the proudest of women, who will soon come to recognise but one form of personal distinction, that namely which any man enjoys who can make her feel those pleasures, an actor, an acrobat even, for whom, perhaps, she will one day leave her husband;—from a certain rosy tint, warm and sensual, which flushed her pallid cheeks, like the colour that stained the hearts of the white water-lilies in the Vivonne, I thought I could discern that she would readily have consented to my coming to seek in her the savour of that life of poetry and romance which she led in Brittany, a life to which, whether from over-familiarity or from innate superiority, or from disgust at the penury or the avarice of her family, she seemed not to attach any great value, but which, for all that, she held enclosed in her body. In the meagre stock of will-power that had been transmitted to her, and gave an element of weakness to her expression, she would not perhaps have found the strength to resist. And, crowned by a feather that was a trifle old-fashioned and pretentious, the grey felt hat which she invariably wore at meals made her all the more attractive to me, not because it was in harmony with her pearly or rosy complexion, but because, by making me suppose her to be poor, it brought her closer to myself. Obliged by her father's presence to adopt a conventional attitude, but already bringing to the perception and classification of the people who passed before her eyes other principles than his, perhaps she saw in me not my humble rank, but the right sex and age. If one day M. de Stermaria had gone out leaving her behind, if, above all, Mme. de Villeparisis, by coming to sit at our table, had given her an opinion of me which might have emboldened me to approach her, perhaps then we might have contrived to exchange a few words, to arrange a meeting, to form a closer tie. And for a whole month during which she would be left alone, without her parents, in her romantic Breton castle, we should perhaps have been able to wander by ourselves at evening, she and I together in the dusk which would shew in a softer light above the darkening water pink briar roses, beneath oak trees beaten and stunted by the hammering of the waves. Together we should have roamed that isle impregnated with so intense a charm for me because it had enclosed the everyday life of Mlle. de Stermaria and lay at rest in her remembering eyes. For it seemed to me that I should not really have possessed her save there, when I should have traversed those regions which enveloped her in so many memories—a veil which my desire sought to tear apart, one of those veils which nature interposes between woman and her pursuers (with the same intention as when, for all of us, she places the act of reproduction between ourselves and our keenest pleasure, and for insects, places before the nectar the pollen which they must carry away with them) in order that, tricked by the illusion of possessing her thus more completely, they may be forced to occupy first the scenes among which she lives, and which, of more service to their imagination than sensual pleasure can be, yet would not without that pleasure have had the power to attract them.

But I was obliged to take my eyes from Mlle. de Stermaria, for already, considering no doubt that making the acquaintance of an important person was a brief, inquisitive act which was sufficient in itself, and to bring out all the interest that was latent in it required only a handshake and a penetrating stare, without either immediate conversation or any subsequent relations, her father had taken leave of the barrister and returned to sit down facing her, rubbing his hands like a man who has just made a valuable acquisition. As for the barrister, once the first emotion of this interview had subsided, then, as on other days, he could be heard every minute addressing the head waiter:

"But I am not a king, Aimé; go and attend to the king! I say, Chief, those little trout don't look at all bad, do they? We must ask Aimé to let us have some. Aimé, that little fish you have over there looks to me highly commendable; will you bring us some, please, Aimé, and don't be sparing with it?"

He would repeat the name 'Aimé' all day long, one result of which was that when he had anyone to dinner the guest would remark "I can see, you are quite at home in this place," and would feel himself obliged to keep on saying 'Aimé' also, from that tendency, combining elements of timidity, vulgarity and silliness, which many people have, to believe that it is smart and witty to copy to the letter what is said by the company in which they may happen to be. The barrister repeated the name incessantly, but with a smile, for he felt that he was exhibiting at once the good terms on which he stood with the head waiter and his own superior station. And the head waiter, whenever he caught the sound of his own name, smiled too, as though touched and at the same time proud, shewing that he was conscious of the honour and could appreciate the pleasantry.

Terrifying as I always found these meals, in the vast restaurant, generally full, of the mammoth hotel, they became even more terrifying when there arrived for a few days the Proprietor (or he may have been only the General Manager, appointed by a board of directors) not only of this 'palace' but of seven or eight more besides, situated at all the four corners of France, in each of which, travelling continuously, he would spend a week now and again. Then, just after dinner had begun, there appeared every evening in the doorway of the dining-room this small man with white hair and a red nose, astonishingly neat and impassive, who was known, it appeared, as well in London as at Monte-Carlo, as one of the leading hotel-keepers in Europe. Once when I had gone out for a moment at the beginning of dinner, as I came in again I passed close by him, and he bowed to me, but with a coldness in which I could not distinguish whether it should be attributed to the reserve of a man who could never forget what he was, or to his contempt for a customer of so little importance. To those whose importance was considerable the Managing Director would bow, with quite as much coldness but more deeply, lowering his eyelids with a reverence that was almost offended modesty, as though he had found himself confronted, at a funeral, with the father of the deceased or with the Blessed Sacrament. Except for these icy and infrequent salutations, he made not the slightest movement, as if to show that his glittering eyes, which appeared to be starting out of his head, saw everything, controlled everything, assured to us in the 'Hotel dinner' perfection in every detail as well as a general harmony. He felt, evidently, that he was more than the producer of a play, than the conductor of an orchestra, nothing less than a general in supreme command. Having decided that a contemplation carried to its utmost intensity would suffice to assure him that everything was in readiness, that no mistake had been made which could lead to disaster,—to invest him, in a word, with full responsibility, he abstained not merely from any gesture but even from moving his eyes, which, petrified by the intensity of their gaze, took in and directed everything that was going on. I felt that even the movements of my spoon did not escape him, and were he to vanish after the soup, for the whole of dinner the review that he had held would have taken away my appetite. His own was exceedingly good, as one could see at luncheon, which he took like an ordinary guest of the hotel at a table that anyone else might have had in the public dining-room. His table had this peculiarity only, that by his side, while he was eating, the other manager, the resident one, remained standing all the time to make conversation. For being subordinate to this Managing Director he was anxious to please a man of whom he lived in constant fear. My fear of him diminished during these luncheons, for being then lost in the crowd of visitors he would exercise the discretion of a general sitting in a restaurant where there are also private soldiers, in not seeming to take any notice of them. Nevertheless when the porter, from among a cluster of pages, announced to me: "He leaves to-morrow morning for Dinard. Then he's going down to Biarritz, and after that to Cannes," I began to breathe more freely.

My life in the hotel was rendered not only dull because I had no friends there but uncomfortable because Françoise had made so many. It might be thought that they would have made things easier for us in various respects. Quite the contrary. The proletariat, if they succeeded only with great difficulty in being treated as people she knew by Françoise, and could not succeed at all unless they fulfilled the condition of shewing the utmost politeness to her, were, on the other hand, once they had reached the position, the only people who 'counted.' Her time-honoured code taught her that she was in no way bound to the friends of her employers, that she might, if she was busy, shut the door without ceremony in the face of a lady who had come to call on my grandmother. But towards her own acquaintance, that is to say, the select handful of the lower orders whom she admitted to an unconquerable intimacy, her actions were regulated by the most subtle and most stringent of protocols. Thus Françoise having made the acquaintance of the man in the coffee-shop and of a little maid who did dressmaking for a Belgian lady, no longer came upstairs immediately after luncheon to get my grandmother's things ready, but came an hour later, because the coffee man had wanted to make her a cup of coffee or a *tisane* in his shop, or the maid had invited her to go and watch her sew, and to refuse either of them would have been impossible, and one of the things that were not done. Moreover, particular attention was due to the little sewing-maid, who was an orphan and had been brought up by strangers to whom she still went occasionally for a few days' holiday. Her unusual situation aroused Françoise's pity, and also a benevolent contempt. She, who had a family, a little house that had come to her from her parents, with a field in which her brother kept his cows, how could she regard so uprooted a creature as her equal? And since this girl hoped, on Assumption Day, to be allowed to pay her benefactors a visit, Françoise kept on repeating: "She does make me laugh! She says, 'I hope to be going home for the Assumption.' 'Home!' says she! It isn't just that it's not her own place, they're people who took her in from nowhere, and the creature says 'home' just as if it really was her home. Poor girl! What a wretched state she must be in, not to know what it is to have a home." Still, if Françoise had associated only with the ladies'-maids brought to the hotel by other visitors, who fed with her in the 'service' quarters and, seeing her grand lace cap and her handsome profile, took her perhaps for some lady of noble birth, whom 'reduced circumstances,' or a personal attachment had driven to serve as companion to my grandmother, if in a word

Françoise had known only people who did not belong to the hotel, no great harm would have been done, since she could not have prevented them from doing us any service, for the simple reason that in no circumstances, even without her knowledge, would it have been possible for them to serve us at all. But she had formed connexions also with one of the wine waiters, with a man in the kitchen, and with the head chambermaid of our landing. And the result of this in our everyday life was that Françoise, who on the day of her arrival, when she still did not know anyone, would set all the bells jangling for the slightest thing, at an hour when my grandmother and I would never have dared to ring, and if we offered some gentle admonition answered: "Well, we're paying enough for it, aren't we?" as though it were she herself that would have to pay; nowadays, since she had made friends with a personage in the kitchen, which had appeared to us to augur well for our future comfort, were my grandmother or I to complain of cold feet, Françoise, even at an hour that was quite normal, dared not ring; she assured us that it would give offence because they would have to light the furnace again, or because it would interrupt the servants' dinner and they would be annoyed. And she ended with a formula that, in spite of the ambiguous way in which she uttered it, was none the less clear, and put us plainly in the wrong: "The fact is . . ." We did not insist, for fear of bringing upon ourselves another, far more serious: "It's a matter . . . !" So that it amounted to this, that we could no longer have any hot water because Françoise had become a friend of the man who would have to heat it.

In the end we too formed a connexion, in spite of but through my grandmother, for she and Mme. de Villeparisis came in collision one morning in a doorway and were obliged to accost each other, not without having first exchanged gestures of surprise and hesitation, performed movements of recoil and uncertainty, and finally uttered protestations of joy and greeting, as in some of Molière's plays, where two actors who have been delivering long soliloquies from opposite sides of the stage, a few feet apart, are supposed not to have seen each other yet, and then suddenly catch sight of each other, cannot believe their eyes, break off what they are saying and finally address each other (the chorus having meanwhile kept the dialogue going) and fall into each other's arms. Mme. de Villeparisis was tactful, and made as if to leave my grandmother to herself after the first greetings, but my grandmother insisted on her staying to talk to her until luncheon, being anxious to discover how her friend managed to get her letters sent up to her earlier than we got ours, and to get such nice grilled things (for Mme. de Villeparisis, a great epicure, had the poorest opinion of the hotel kitchen which served us with meals that my grandmother, still quoting Mme. de Sévigné, described as "of a magnificence to make you die of hunger.") And the Marquise formed the habit of coming every day, until her own meal was ready, to sit down for a moment at our table in the dining-room, insisting that we should not rise from our chairs or in any way put ourselves out. At the most we would linger, as often as not, in the room after finishing our luncheon, to talk to her, at that sordid moment when the knives are left littering the tablecloth among crumpled napkins. For my own part, so as to preserve (in order that I might be able to enjoy Balbec) the idea that I was on the uttermost promontory of the earth, I compelled myself to look farther afield, to notice only the sea, to seek in it the effects described by Baudelaire and to let my gaze fall upon our table only on days when there was set on it some gigantic fish, some marine monster, which unlike the knives and forks was contemporary with the primitive epochs in which the Ocean first began to teem with life, in the Cimmerians' time, a fish whose body with its numberless vertebrae, its blue veins and red, had been constructed by nature, but according to an architectural plan, like a polychrome cathedral of the deep.

As a barber, seeing an officer whom he is accustomed to shave with special deference and care recognise a customer who has just entered the shop and stop for a moment to talk to him, rejoices in the thought that these are two men of the same social order, and cannot help smiling as he goes to fetch the bowl of soap, for he knows that in his establishment, to the vulgar routine of a mere barber's-shop, are being added social, not to say aristocratic pleasures, so Aimé, seeing that Mme. de Villeparisis had found in us old friends, went to fetch our finger-bowls with precisely the smile, proudly modest and knowingly discreet, of a hostess who knows when to leave her guests to themselves. He suggested also a pleased and loving father who looks on, without interfering, at the happy pair who have plighted their troth at his hospitable board. Besides, it was enough merely to utter the name of a person of title for Aimé to appear pleased, unlike Françoise, before whom you could not mention Count So-and-so without her face darkening and her speech becoming dry and sharp, all of which meant that she worshipped the aristocracy not less than Aimé but far more. But then Françoise had that quality which in others she condemned as the worst possible fault; she was proud. She was not of that friendly and good-humoured race to which Aimé belonged. They feel, they exhibit an intense delight when you tell them a piece of news which may be more or less sensational but is at any rate new, and not to be found in the papers. Françoise declined to appear surprised. You might have announced in her hearing that the Archduke Rudolf—not that she had the least suspicion of his having ever existed—was not, as was generally supposed, dead, but 'alive and kicking'; she would have answered only 'Yes,' as though she had known it all the time. It may, however, have been that if even from our own lips, from us whom she so meekly called her masters, who had so nearly succeeded in taming her, she could not, without having to check an angry start, hear the name of a noble, that was because the family from which she had sprung occupied in its own village a comfortable and independent position, and was not to be threatened in the consideration which it enjoyed save by those same nobles, in whose households, meanwhile, from his boyhood, an Aimé would have been domiciled as a servant, if not actually brought up by their charity. Of Françoise, then, Mme. de Villeparisis must ask pardon, first, for her nobility. But (in France, at any rate) that is precisely the talent, in fact the sole occupation of our great gentlemen and ladies. Françoise, following the common tendency of servants, who pick up incessantly from the conversation of their masters with other people fragmentary observations from which they are apt to draw erroneous inductions, as the human race generally does with respect to the habits of animals, was constantly discovering that somebody had 'failed' us, a conclusion to which she was easily led, not so much, perhaps, by her extravagant love for us, as by the delight that she took in being disagreeable to us. But having once established, without possibility of error, the endless little attentions paid to us, and paid to herself also by Mme. de Villeparisis, Françoise forgave her for being a Marquise, and, as she had never ceased to be proud of her because she was one, preferred her thenceforward to all our other friends. It must be added that no one else took the trouble to be so continually nice to us. Whenever my grandmother remarked on a book that Mme. de Villeparisis was reading, or said she had been admiring the fruit which some one had just sent to our friend, within an hour the footman would come to our rooms with book or fruit. And the next time we saw her, in response to our thanks, she would say only, seeming to seek some excuse for the meagreness of her present in some special use to which it might be put: "It's nothing wonderful, but the newspapers come so late here, one must have something to read." Or, "It is always wiser to have fruit one can be quite certain of, at the seaside."—"But I don't believe I've ever seen you eating oysters," she said to us, increasing the sense of disgust which I felt at that moment, for the living flesh of the oyster revolted me even more than the gumminess of the stranded jellyfish defiled for me the beach at Balbec; "they are delicious down here! Oh, let me tell my maid to fetch your letters when she goes for mine. What, your daughter writes *every day*? But what on earth can you find to say to each other?" My grandmother was silent, but it may be assumed that her silence was due to scorn, in her who used to repeat, when she wrote to Mamma, the words of Mme. de Sévigné: "As soon as I have received a letter, I want another at once; I cannot breathe until it comes. There are few who are worthy to understand what I mean." And I was afraid of her applying to Mme. de Villeparisis the conclusion: "I seek out those who are of the chosen few, and I avoid the rest." She fell back upon praise of the fruit which Mme. de Villeparisis had sent us the day before. And this had been, indeed, so fine that the manager, in spite of the jealousy aroused by our neglect of his official offerings, had said to me: "I am like you; I'm madder about fruit than any other kind of dessert." My grandmother told her friend that she had enjoyed them all the more because the fruit which we got in the hotel was generally horrid. "I cannot," she went on, "say, like Mme. de Sévigné, that if we should take a sudden fancy for bad fruit we should be obliged to order it from Paris." "Oh yes, of course, you read Mme. de Sévigné. I saw you with her letters the day you came." (She forgot that she had never officially seen my grandmother in the hotel until their collision in the doorway.) "Don't you find it rather exaggerated, her constant anxiety about her daughter? She refers to it too often to be really sincere. She is not natural." My grandmother felt that any discussion would be futile, and so as not to be obliged to speak of the things she loved to a person incapable of understanding them, concealed by laying her bag upon them the *Mémoires de Mme. de Beausergent.*

Were she to encounter Françoise at the moment (which Françoise called 'the noon') when, wearing her fine cap and surrounded with every mark of respect, she was coming downstairs to 'feed with the service,' Mme. Villeparisis would stop her to ask after us. And Françoise, when transmitting to us the Marquise's message: "She said to me, 'You'll be sure and bid them good day,' she said," counterfeited the voice of Mme. de Villeparisis, whose exact words she imagined herself to be quoting textually, whereas she was really corrupting them no less than Plato corrupts the words of Socrates or Saint John the words of Jesus. Françoise, as was natural, was deeply touched by these attentions. Only she did not believe my grandmother, but supposed that she must be lying in the interest of her class (the rich always combining thus to support one another) when she assured us that Mme. de Villeparisis had been lovely as a young woman. It was true that of this loveliness only the faintest trace remained, from which no one—unless he happened to be a great deal more of an artist than Françoise—would have been able to restore her ruined beauty. For in order to understand how beautiful an elderly woman can once have been one must not only study but interpret every line of her face.

"I must remember, some time, to ask her whether I'm not right, after all, in thinking that there is some connexion with the Guermantes," said my grandmother, to my great indignation. How could I be expected to believe in a common origin uniting two names which had entered my consciousness, one through the low and shameful gate of experience, the other by the golden gate of imagination?

We had several times, in the last few days, seen driving past us in a stately equipage, tall, auburn, handsome, with a rather prominent nose, the Princesse de Luxembourg, who was staying in the neighbourhood for a few weeks. Her carriage had stopped outside the hotel, a footman had come in and spoken to the manager, had gone back to the carriage and had reappeared with the most amazing armful of fruit (which combined in a single basket, like the bay itself, different seasons) with a card: "La Princesse de Luxembourg," on which were scrawled a few words in pencil. For what princely traveller sojourning here *incognito,* could they be intended, those glaucous plums, luminous and spherical as was at that moment the circumfluent sea, transparent grapes clustering on a shrivelled stick, like a fine day in autumn, pears of a heavenly ultramarine? For it could not be on my grandmother's friend that the Princess had meant to pay a call. And yet on the following evening Mme. de Villeparisis sent us the bunch of grapes, cool, liquid, golden; plums too and pears which we remembered, though the plums had changed, like the sea at our dinner-hour, to a dull purple, and on the ultramarine surface of the pears there floated the forms of a few rosy clouds. A few days later we met Mme. de Villeparisis as we came away from the symphony concert that was given every morning on the beach. Convinced that the music to which I had been listening (the Prelude to *Lohengrin,* the Overture to *Tannhäuser* and suchlike) expressed the loftiest of truths, I was trying to elevate myself, as far as I could, so as to attain to a comprehension of them, I was extracting from myself so as to understand them, and was attributing to them, all that was best and most profound in my own nature at that time.

Well, as we came out of the concert, and, on our way back to the hotel, had stopped for a moment on the 'front,' my grandmother and I, for a few words with Mme. de Villeparisis who told us that she had ordered some *croque-monsieurs* and a dish of creamed eggs for us at the hotel, I saw, a long way away, coming in our direction, the Princesse de Luxembourg, half leaning upon a parasol in such a way as to impart to her tall and wonderful form that slight inclination, to make it trace that arabesque dear to the women who had been beautiful under the Empire, and knew how, with drooping shoulders, arched backs, concave hips and bent limbs, to make their bodies float as gently as a silken scarf about the rigidity of the invisible stem which might be supposed to have been passed diagonally through them. She went out every morning for a turn on the beach almost at the time when everyone else, after bathing, was climbing home to luncheon, and as hers was not until half past one she did not return to her villa until long after the hungry bathers had left the scorching 'front' a desert. Mme. de Villeparisis presented my grandmother and would have presented me, but had first to ask me my name, which she could not remember. She had, perhaps, never known it, or if she had must have forgotten years ago to whom my grandmother had married her daughter. My name, when she did hear it, appeared to impress Mme. de Villeparisis considerably. Meanwhile the Princesse de Luxembourg had given us her hand and, now and again, while she conversed with the Marquise, turned to bestow a kindly glance on my grandmother and myself, with that embryonic kiss which we put into our smiles when they are addressed to a baby out with its 'Nana.' Indeed, in her anxiety not to appear to be a denizen of a higher sphere than ours, she had probably miscalculated the distance there was indeed between us, for by an error in adjustment she made her eyes beam with such benevolence that I could see the moment approaching when she would put out her hand and stroke us, as if we were two nice beasts and had poked our heads out at her through the bars of our cage in the Gardens. And, immediately, as it happened, this idea of caged animals and the Bois de Boulogne received striking confirmation. It was the time of day at which the beach is crowded by itinerant and clamorous vendors, hawking cakes and sweets and biscuits. Not knowing quite what to do to shew her affection for us, the Princess hailed the next that came by; he had nothing left but one rye-cake, of the kind one throws to the ducks. The Princess took it and said to me: "For your grandmother." And yet it was to me that she held it out, saying with a friendly smile, "You shall give it to her yourself!" thinking that my pleasure would thus be more complete if there were no intermediary between myself and the animals. Other vendors came up; she stuffed my pockets with everything that they had, tied up in packets, comfits, sponge-cakes, sugar-sticks. "You will eat some yourself," she told me, "and give some to your grandmother," and she had the vendors paid by the little Negro page, dressed in red satin, who followed her everywhere and was a nine days' wonder upon the beach.

Then she said good-bye to Mme. de Villeparisis and held out her hand to us with the intention of treating us in the same way as she treated her friend, as people whom she knew, and of bringing herself within our reach. But this time she must have reckoned our level as not quite so low in the scale of creation, for her and our equality was indicated by the Princess to my grandmother by that tender and maternal smile which a woman gives a little boy when she says good-bye to him as though to a grown-up person. By a miraculous stride in evolution, my grandmother was no longer a duck or an antelope, but had already become what the anglophil Mme. Swann would have called a 'baby.' Finally, having taken leave of us all, the Princess resumed her stroll along the basking 'front,' curving her splendid shape which, like a serpent coiled about a wand, was interlaced with the white parasol patterned in blue which Mme. de Luxembourg held, unopened, in her hand. She was my first Royalty—I say my first, for strictly speaking Princesse Mathilde did not count. The second, as we shall see in due course, was to astonish me no less by her indulgence. One of the ways in which our great nobles, kindly intermediaries between commoners and kings, can befriend us was revealed to me next day when Mme. de Villeparisis reported: "She thought you quite charming. She is a woman of the soundest judgment, the warmest heart. Not like so many Queens and people! She has real merit." And Mme. de Villeparisis went on in a tone of conviction, and quite thrilled to be able to say it to us: "I am sure she would be delighted to see you again."

But on that previous morning, after we had parted from the Princesse de Luxembourg, Mme. de Villeparisis said a thing which impressed me far more and was not prompted merely by friendly feeling.

"Are you," she had asked me, "the son of the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry? Indeed! I am told your father is a most charming man. He is having a splendid holiday just now."

A few days earlier we had heard, in a letter from Mamma, that my father and his friend M. de Norpois had lost their luggage.

"It has been found; as a matter of fact, it was never really lost, I can tell you what happened," explained Mme. de Villeparisis, who, without our knowing how, seemed to be far better informed than ourselves of the course of my father's travels. "I think your father is now planning to come home earlier, next week, in fact, as he will probably give up the idea of going to Algeciras. But he is anxious to devote a day longer to Toledo; it seems, he is an admirer of a pupil of Titian,—I forget the name—whose work can only be seen properly there."

I asked myself by what strange accident, in the impartial glass through which Mme. de Villeparisis considered, from a safe distance, the bustling, tiny, purposeless agitation of the crowd of people whom she knew, there had come to be inserted at the spot through which she observed my father a fragment of prodigious magnifying power which made her see in such high relief and in the fullest detail everything that there was attractive about him, the contingencies that were obliging him to return home, his difficulties with the customs, his admiration for El Greco, and, altering the scale of her vision, shewed her this one man so large among all the rest quite small, like that Jupiter to whom Gustave Moreau gave, when he portrayed him by the side of a weak mortal, a superhuman stature.

My grandmother bade Mme. de Villeparisis good-bye, so that we might stay and imbibe the fresh air for a little while longer outside the hotel, until they signalled to us through the glazed partition that our luncheon was ready. There were sounds of tumult. The young mistress of the King of the Cannibal Island had been down to bathe and was now coming back to the hotel.

"Really and truly, it's a perfect plague: it's enough to make one decide to emigrate!" cried the barrister, who had happened to cross her path, in a towering rage.

Meanwhile the solicitor's wife was following the bogus Queen with eyes that seemed ready to start from their sockets.

"I can't tell you how angry Mme. Blandais makes me when she stares at those people like that," said the barrister to the chief magistrate, "I feel I want to slap her. That is just the way to make the wretches appear important; and of course that's the very thing they want, that people should take an interest in them. Do ask her husband to tell her what a fool she's making of herself. I swear I won't go out with them again if they stop and gape at those masqueraders."

As to the coming of the Princesse de Luxembourg, whose carriage, on the day on which she left the fruit, had drawn up outside the hotel, it had not passed unobserved by the little group of wives, the solicitor's, the barrister's and the magistrate's, who had for some time past been most concerned to know whether she was a genuine Marquise and not an adventuress, that Mme. de Villeparisis whom everyone treated with so much respect, which all these ladies were burning to hear that she did not deserve. Whenever Mme. de Villeparisis passed through the hall the chief magistrate's wife, who scented irregularities everywhere, would raise her eyes from her 'work' and stare at the intruder in a way that made her friends die of laughter.

"Oh, well, you know," she explained with lofty condescension, "I always begin by believing the worst. I will never admit that a woman is properly married until she has shewn me her birth certificate and her marriage lines. But there's no need to alarm yourselves; just wait till I've finished my little investigation."

And so, day after day the ladies would come together, and, laughingly, ask one another: "Any news?"

But on the evening after the Princesse de Luxembourg's call the magistrate's wife laid a finger on her lips.

"I've discovered something."

"Oh, isn't Mme. Poncin simply wonderful? I never saw anyone. . . . But do tell us! What has happened?"

"Just listen to this. A woman with yellow hair and six inches of paint on her face and a carriage like a—you could *smell* it a mile off; which only a creature like that would dare to have—came here to-day to call on the Marquise, by way of!"

"Oh-yow-yow! Tut-tut-tut-tut. Did you ever! Why, it must be that woman we saw—you remember, Leader,—we said at the time we didn't at all like the look of her, but we didn't know that it was the 'Marquise' she'd come to see. A woman with a nigger-boy, you mean?"

"That's the one."

"D'you mean to say so? You don't happen to know her name?"

"Yes, I made a mistake on purpose; I picked up her card; she *trades* under the name of the 'Princesse de Luxembourg!' Wasn't I right to have my doubts about her? It's a nice thing to have to mix promiscuously with a Baronne d'Ange like that?" The barrister quoted Mathurin Régnier's *Macette* to the chief magistrate.

It must not, however, be supposed that this misunderstanding was merely temporary, like those that occur in the second act of a farce to be cleared up before the final curtain. Mme. de Luxembourg, a niece of the King of England and of the Emperor of Austria, and Mme. de Villeparisis, when one called to take the other for a drive, did look like nothing but two 'old trots' of the kind one has always such difficulty in avoiding at a watering place. Nine tenths of the men of the Faubourg Saint-Germain appear to the average man of the middle class simply as alcoholic wasters (which, individually, they not infrequently are) whom, therefore, no respectable person would dream of asking to dinner. The middle class fixes its standard, in this respect, too high, for the feelings of these men would never prevent their being received with every mark of esteem in houses which it, the middle class, may never enter. And so sincerely do they believe that the middle class knows this that they affect a simplicity in speaking of their own affairs and a tone of disparagement of their friends, especially when they are 'at the coast,' which make the misunderstanding complete. If, by any chance, a man of the fashionable world is kept in touch with 'business people' because, having more money than he knows what to do with, he finds himself elected chairman of all sorts of important financial concerns, the business man who at last sees a nobleman worthy, he considers, to rank with 'big business,' would take his oath that such a man can have no dealings with the Marquis ruined by gambling whom the said business man supposes to be all the more destitute of friends the more friendly he makes himself. And he cannot get over his surprise when the Duke, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the colossal undertaking, arranges a marriage for his son with the daughter of that very Marquis, who may be a gambler but who bears the oldest name in France, just as a Sovereign would sooner see his son marry the daughter of a dethroned King than that of a President still in office. That is to say, the two worlds take as fantastic a view of one another as the inhabitants of a town situated at one end of Balbec Bay have of the town at the other end: from Rivebelle you can just see Marcouville l'Orgueilleuse; but even that is deceptive, for you imagine that you are seen from Marcouville, where, as a matter of fact, the splendours of Rivebelle are almost wholly invisible.

PART II

PLACE-NAMES: THE PLACE

THE Balbec doctor, who had been called in to cope with a sudden feverish attack, having given the opinion that I ought not to stay out all day on the beach, in the blazing sun, without shelter, and having written out various prescriptions for my use, my grandmother took his prescriptions with a show of respect in which I could at once discern her firm resolve not to have any of them 'made up,' but did pay attention to his advice on the matter of hygiene, and accepted an offer from Mme. de Villeparisis to take us for drives in her carriage. After this I would spend the mornings, until luncheon, going to and fro between my own room and my grandmother's. Hers did not look out directly upon the sea, as mine did, but was lighted from three of its four sides—with views of a strip of the 'front,' of a well inside the building, and of the country inland, and was furnished differently from mine, with armchairs upholstered in a metallic tissue with red flowers from which seemed to emanate the cool and pleasant odour that greeted me when I entered the room. And at that hour when the sun's rays, coming from different aspects and, as it were, from different hours of the day, broke the angles of the wall, thrust in a reflexion of the beach, made of the chest of drawers a festal altar, variegated as a bank of field-flowers, attached to the wall the wings, folded, quivering, warm, of a radiance that would, at any moment, resume its flight, warmed like a bath a square of provincial carpet before the window overlooking the well, which the sun festooned and patterned like a climbing vine, added to the charm and complexity of the room's furniture by seeming to pluck and scatter the petals of the silken flowers on the chairs, and to make their silver threads stand out from the fabric, this room in which I lingered for a moment before going to get ready for our drive suggested a prism in which the colours of the light that shone outside were broken up, or a hive in which the sweet juices of the day which I was about to taste were distilled, scattered, intoxicating, visible, a garden of hope which dissolved in a quivering haze of silver threads and rose leaves. But before all this I had drawn back my own curtains, impatient to know what Sea it was that was playing that morning by the shore, like a Nereid. For none of those Seas ever stayed with us longer than a day. On the morrow there would be another, which sometimes resembled its predecessor. But I never saw the same one twice.

There were some that were of so rare a beauty that my pleasure on catching sight of them was enhanced by surprise. By what privilege, on one morning rather than another, did the window on being uncurtained disclose to my wondering eyes the nymph Glauconome, whose lazy beauty, gently breathing, had the transparence of a vaporous emerald beneath whose surface I could see teeming the ponderable elements that coloured it? She made the sun join in her play, with a smile rendered languorous by an invisible haze which was nought but a space kept vacant about her translucent surface, which, thus curtailed, became more appealing, like those goddesses whom the sculptor carves in relief upon a block of marble, the rest of which he leaves unchiselled. So, in her matchless colour, she invited us out over those rough terrestrial roads, from which, seated beside Mme. de Villeparisis in her barouche, we should see, all day long and without ever reaching it, the coolness of her gentle palpitation.

Mme. de Villeparisis used to order her carriage early, so that we should have time to reach Saint-Mars le Vêtu, or the rocks of Quetteholme, or some other goal which, for a somewhat lumbering vehicle, was far enough off to require the whole day. In my joy at the long drive we were going to take I would be humming some tune that I had heard recently as I strolled up and down until Mme. de Villeparisis was ready. If it was Sunday hers would not be the only carriage drawn up outside the hotel; several hired flies would be waiting there, not only for the people who had been invited to Féterne by Mme. de Cambremer, but for those who, rather than stay at home all day, like children in disgrace, declared that Sunday was always quite impossible at Balbec and started off immediately after luncheon to hide themselves in some neighbouring watering-place or to visit one of the 'sights' of the district. And indeed whenever (which was often) anyone asked Mme. Blandais if she had been to the Cambremers', she would answer peremptorily: "No; we went to the Falls of the Bec," as though that were the sole reason for her not having spent the day at Féterne. And the barrister would be charitable, and say:

"I envy you. I wish I had gone there instead; they must be well worth seeing."

Beside the row of carriages, in front of the porch in which I stood waiting, was planted, like some shrub of a rare species, a young page who attracted the eye no less by the unusual and effective colouring of his hair than by his plant-like epidermis. Inside, in the hall, corresponding to the narthex, or Church of the Catechumens in a primitive basilica, through which persons who were not staying in the hotel were entitled to pass, the comrades of this 'outside' page did not indeed work much harder than he but did at least execute certain drilled movements. It is probable that in the early morning they helped with the cleaning. But in the afternoon they stood there only like a Chorus who, even when there is nothing for them to do, remain upon the stage in order to strengthen the cast. The General Manager, the same who had so terrified me, reckoned on increasing their number considerably next year, for he had 'big ideas.' And this prospect greatly afflicted the manager of the hotel, who found that all these boys about the place only 'created a nuisance,' by which he meant that they got in the visitors' way and were of no use to anyone. But between luncheon and dinner at least, between the exits and entrances of the visitors, they did fill an otherwise empty stage, like those pupils of Mme. de Maintenon who, in the garb of young Israelites, carry on the action whenever Esther or Joad 'goes off.' But the outside page, with his delicate tints, his tall, slender, fragile trunk, in proximity to whom I stood waiting for the Marquise to come downstairs, preserved an immobility into which a certain melancholy entered, for his elder brothers had left the hotel for more brilliant careers elsewhere, and he felt keenly his isolation upon this alien soil. At last Mme. de Villeparisis appeared. To stand by her carriage and to help her into it ought perhaps to have been part of the young page's duties. But he knew on the one hand that a person who brings her own servants to an hotel expects them to wait on her and is not as a rule lavish with her 'tips,' and that generally speaking this was true also of the nobility of the old Faubourg Saint-Germain. Mme. de Villeparisis was included in both these categories. The arborescent page concluded therefore that he need expect nothing from her, and leaving her own maid and footman to pack her and her belongings into the carriage, he continued to dream sadly of the enviable lot of his brothers and preserved his vegetable immobility.

We would start off; some time after rounding the railway station, we came into a country road which soon became as familiar to me as the roads round Combray, from the bend where, like a fish-hook, it was baited with charming orchards, to the turning at which we left it, with tilled fields upon either side. Among these we could see here and there an apple-tree, stripped it was true of its blossom, and bearing no more now than a fringe of pistils, but sufficient even so to enchant me since I could imagine, seeing those inimitable leaves, how their broad expanse, like the ceremonial carpet spread for a wedding that was now over, had been but the other day swept by the white satin train of their blushing flowers.

How often in Paris, during the May of the following year, was I to bring home a branch of apple-blossom from the florist, and to stay all night long before its flowers in which bloomed the same creamy essence that powdered besides and whitened the green unfolding leaves, flowers between whose snowy cups it seemed almost as though it had been the salesman who had, in his generosity towards myself, out of his wealth of invention too and as an effective contrast, added on either side the supplement of a becoming crimson bud: I sat gazing at them, I grouped them in the light of my lamp—for so long that I was often still there when the dawn brought to their whiteness the same flush with which it must at that moment have been tingeing their sisters on the Balbec road—and I sought to carry them back in my imagination to that roadside, to multiply them, to spread them out, so as to fill the frame prepared for them, on the canvas, all ready, of those closes the outline of which I knew by heart, which I so longed to see—which one day I must see again, at the moment when, with the exquisite fervour of genius, spring was covering their canvas with its colours.

Before getting into the carriage I had composed the seascape for which I was going to look out, which I had hoped to see with the 'sun radiant' upon it, and which at Balbec I could distinguish only in too fragmentary a form, broken by so many vulgar intromissions that had no place in my dream, bathers, dressing-boxes, pleasure yachts. But when, Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage having reached high ground, I caught a glimpse of the sea through the leafy boughs of trees, then no doubt at such a distance those temporal details which had set the sea, as it were, apart from nature and history disappeared, and I could as I looked down towards its waves make myself realise that they were the same which Leconte de Lisle describes for us in his *Orestie,* where "like a flight of birds of prey, before the dawn of day" the long-haired warriors of heroic Hellas "with oars an hundred thousand sweep the huge resounding deep." But on the other hand I was no longer near enough to the sea which seemed to me not a living thing now, but fixed; I no longer felt any power beneath its colours, spread like those of a picture among the leaves, through which it appeared as inconsistent as the sky and only of an intenser blue.

Mme. de Villeparisis, seeing that I was fond of churches, promised me that we should visit one one day and another another, and especially the church at Carqueville 'quite buried in all its old ivy,' as she said with a wave of the hand which seemed tastefully to be clothing the absent 'front' in an invisible and delicate screen of foliage. Mme. de Villeparisis would often, with this little descriptive gesture, find just the right word to define the attraction and the distinctive features of an historic building, always avoiding technical terms, but incapable of concealing her thorough understanding of the things to which she referred. She appeared to seek an excuse for this erudition in the fact that one of her father's country houses, the one in which she had lived as a girl, was situated in a district in which there were churches similar in style to those round Balbec, so that it would have been unaccountable if she had not acquired a taste for architecture, this house being, incidentally, one of the finest examples of that of the Renaissance. But as it was also a regular museum, as moreover Chopin and Liszt had played there, Lamartine recited poetry, all the most famous artists for fully a century inscribed 'sentiments,' scored melodies, made sketches in the family album, Mme. de Villeparisis ascribed, whether from delicacy, good breeding, true modesty or want of intelligence, only this purely material origin to her acquaintance with all the arts, and had come, apparently, to regard painting, music, literature and philosophy as the appanage of a young lady brought up on the most aristocratic lines in an historic building that was catalogued and starred. You would have said, listening to her, that she knew of no pictures that were not heirlooms. She was pleased that my grandmother liked a necklace which she wore, and which fell over her dress. It appeared in the portrait of an ancestress of her own by Titian which had never left the family. So that one could be certain of its being genuine. She would not listen to a word about pictures bought, heaven knew where, by a Croesus, she was convinced before you spoke that they were forgeries, and had so desire to see them. We knew that she herself painted flowers in water-colour, and my grandmother, who had heard these praised, spoke to her of them. Mme. de Villeparisis modestly changed the subject, but without shewing either surprise or pleasure more than would an artist whose reputation was established and to whom compliments meant nothing. She said merely that it was a delightful pastime because, even if the flowers that sprang from the brush were nothing wonderful, at least the work made you live in the company of real flowers, of the beauty of which, especially when you were obliged to study them closely in order to draw them, you could never grow tired. But at Balbec

Mme. de Villeparisis was giving herself a holiday, so as to spare her eyes.

We were astonished, my grandmother and I, to find how much more 'Liberal' she was than even the majority of the middle class. She did not understand how anyone could be scandalised by the expulsion of the Jesuits, saying that it had always been done, even under the Monarchy, in Spain even. She took up the defence of the Republic, and against its anti-clericalism had not more to say than: "I should be equally annoyed whether they prevented me from hearing mass when I wanted to, or forced me to hear it when I didn't!" and even startled us with such utterances as: "Oh! the aristocracy in these days, what does it amount to?" "To my mind, a man who doesn't work doesn't count!"—perhaps only because she felt that they gained point and flavour, became memorable, in fact, on her lips.

When we heard these advanced opinions—though never so far advanced as to amount to Socialism, which Mme. de Villeparisis held in abhorrence—expressed so frequently and with so much frankness precisely by one of those people in consideration of whose intelligence our scrupulous and timid impartiality would refuse to condemn outright the ideas of the Conservatives, we came very near, my grandmother and I, to believing that in the pleasant companion of our drives was to be found the measure and the pattern of truth in all things. We took her word for it when she appreciated her Titians, the colonnade of her country house, the conversational talent of Louis-Philippe. But—like those mines of learning who hold us spellbound when we get them upon Egyptian paintings or Etruscan inscriptions, and yet talk so tediously about modern work that we ask ourselves whether we have not been over-estimating the interest of the sciences in which they are versed since there is not apparent in their treatment of them the mediocrity of mind which they must have brought to those studies just as much as to their fatuous essays on Baudelaire—Mme. de Villeparisis, questioned by me about Chateaubriand, about Balzac, about Victor Hugo, each of whom had in his day been the guest of her parents, and had been seen and spoken to by her, smiled at my reverence, told amusing anecdotes of them, such as she had a moment ago been telling us of dukes and statesmen, and severely criticised those writers simply because they had been lacking in that modesty, that self-effacement, that sober art which is satisfied with a single right line, and lays no stress on it, which avoids more than anything else the absurdity of grandiloquence, in that opportuneness, those qualities of moderation, of judgment and simplicity to which she had been taught that real greatness aspired and attained: it was evident that she had no hesitation in placing above them men who might after all, perhaps, by virtue of those qualities, have had the advantage of a Balzac, a Hugo, a Vigny in a drawing-room, an academy, a cabinet council, men like Molé, Fontanes, Vitroles, Bersot, Pasquier, Lebrun, Salvandy or Daru.

"Like those novels of Stendhal, which you seem to admire. You would have given him a great surprise, I assure you, if you had spoken to him in that tone. My father, who used to meet him at M. Mérimée's—now he was a man of talent, if you like—often told me that Beyle (that was his real name) was appallingly vulgar, but quite good company at dinner, and never in the least conceited about his books. Why, you can see for yourself how he just shrugged his shoulders at the absurdly extravagant compliments of M. de Balzac. There at least he shewed that he knew how to behave like a gentleman." She possessed the autographs of all these great men, and seemed, when she put forward the personal relations which her family had had with them, to assume that her judgment of them must be better founded than that of young people who, like myself, had had no opportunity of meeting them. "I'm sure I have a right to speak, for they used to come to my father's house; and as M. Sainte-Beuve, who was a most intelligent man, used to say, in forming an estimate you must take the word of people who saw them close, and were able to judge more exactly of their real worth."

Sometimes as the carriage laboured up a steep road through tilled country, making the fields more real, adding to them a mark of authenticity like the precious flower with which certain of the old masters used to sign their pictures, a few hesitating cornflowers, like the Combray cornflowers, would stream in our wake. Presently the horses outdistanced them, but a little way on we would catch sight of another which while it stayed our coming had pricked up to welcome us amid the grass its azure star; some made so bold as to come and plant themselves by the side of the road, and the impression left in my mind was a nebulous blend of distant memories and of wild flowers grown tame.

We began to go down hill; and then met, climbing on foot, on a bicycle, in a cart or carriage, one of those creatures—flowers of a fine day but unlike the flowers of the field, for each of them secretes something that is not to be found in another, with the result that we can never satisfy upon any of her fellows the desire which she has brought to birth in us—a farm-girl driving her cow or half-lying along a waggon, a shopkeeper's daughter taking the air, a fashionable young lady erect on the back seat of a landau, facing her parents. Certainly Bloch had been the means of opening a new era and had altered the value of life for me on the day when he had told me that the dreams which I had entertained on my solitary walks along the Méséglise way, when I hoped that some peasant girl might pass whom I could take in my arms, were not a mere fantasy which corresponded to nothing outside myself, but that all the girls one met, whether villagers or 'young ladies,' were alike ready and willing to give ear to such prayers. And even if I were fated, now that I was ill and did not go out by myself, never to be able to make love to them, I was happy all the same, like a child born in a prison or a hospital, who, having always supposed that the human organism was capable of digesting only dry bread and 'physic,' has learned suddenly that peaches, apricots and grapes are not simply part of the decoration of the country scene but delicious and easily assimilated food. Even if his gaoler or his nurse does not allow him to pluck those tempting fruits, still the world seems to him a better place and existence in it more clement. For a desire seems to us more attractive, we repose on it with more confidence, when we know that outside ourselves there is a reality which conforms to it, even if, for us, it is not to be realised. And we think with more joy of a life in which (on condition that we eliminate for a moment from our mind the tiny obstacle, accidental and special, which prevents us personally from doing so) we can imagine ourself to be assuaging that desire. As to the pretty girls who went past, from the day on which I had first known that their cheeks could be kissed, I had become curious about their souls. And the universe had appeared to me more interesting.

Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage moved fast. Scarcely had I time to see the girl who was coming in our direction; and yet—as the beauty of people is not like the beauty of things, as we feel that it is that of an unique creature, endowed with consciousness and free-will—as soon as her individuality, a soul still vague, a will unknown to me, presented a tiny picture of itself, enormously reduced but complete, in the depths of her indifferent eyes, at once, by a mysterious response of the pollen ready in me for the pistils that should receive it, I felt surging through me the embryo, as vague, as minute, of the desire not to let this girl pass without forcing her mind to become conscious of my person, without preventing her desires from wandering to some one else, without coming to fix myself in her dreams and to seize and occupy her heart. Meanwhile our carriage rolled away from her, the pretty girl was already left behind, and as she had—of me—none of those notions which constitute a person in one's mind, her eyes which had barely seen me had forgotten me already. Was it because I had caught but a fragmentary glimpse of her that I had found her so attractive? It may have been. In the first place, the impossibility of stopping when I came to her, the risk of not meeting her again another day, give at once to such a girl the same charm as a place derives from the illness or poverty that prevents us from visiting it, or the so unadventurous days through which we should otherwise have to live from the battle in which we shall doubtless fall. So that, if there were no such thing as habit, life must appear delightful to those of us who would at every moment be threatened with death—that is to say, to all mankind. Then, if our imagination is set going by the desire for what we may not possess, its flight is not limited by a reality completely perceived, in these casual encounters in which the charms of the passing stranger are generally in direct ratio to the swiftness of our passage. If only night is falling and the carriage is moving fast, whether in town or country, there is not a female torso, mutilated like an antique marble by the speed that tears us away and the dusk that drowns it, but aims at our heart, from every turning in the road, from the lighted interior of every shop, the arrows of Beauty, that Beauty of which we are sometimes tempted to ask ourselves whether it is, in this world, anything more than the complementary part that is added to a fragmentary and fugitive stranger by our imagination over-stimulated by regret.

Had I been free to stop, to get down from the carriage and to speak to the girl whom we were passing, should I perhaps have been disillusioned by some fault in her complexion which from the carriage I had not distinguished? (After which every effort to penetrate into her life would have seemed suddenly impossible. For beauty is a sequence of hypotheses which ugliness cuts short when it bars the way that we could already see opening into the unknown.) Perhaps a single word which she might have uttered, a smile, would have furnished me with a key, a clue that I had not expected, to read the expression of her face, to interpret her bearing, which would at once have ceased to be of any interest. It is possible, for I have never in real life met any girls so desirable as on days when I was with some serious person from whom, despite the myriad pretexts that I invented, I could not tear myself away: some years after that in which I went for the first time to Balbec, as I was driving through Paris with a friend of my father, and had caught sight of a woman walking quickly along the dark street, I felt that it was unreasonable to forfeit, for a purely conventional scruple, my share of happiness in what may very well be the only life there is, and jumping from the carriage without a word of apology I followed in quest of the stranger; lost her where two streets crossed; caught her up again in a third, and arrived at last, breathless, beneath a street lamp, face to face with old Mme. Verdurin whom I had been carefully avoiding for years, and who, in her delight and surprise, exclaimed: "But how very nice of you to have run all this way just to say how d'ye-do to me!"

That year at Balbec, at the moments of such encounters, I would assure my grandmother and Mme. de Villeparisis that I had so severe a headache that the best thing for me would be to go home alone on foot. But they would never let me get out of the carriage. And I must add that pretty girl (far harder to find again than an historic building, for she was nameless and had the power of locomotion) to the collection of all those whom I promised myself that I would examine more closely at a later date. One of them, however, happened to pass more than once before my eyes in circumstances which allowed me to believe that I should be able to get to know her when I chose. This was a milk-girl who came from a farm with an additional supply of cream for the hotel. I fancied that she had recognised me also; and she did, in fact, look at me with an attentiveness which was perhaps due only to the surprise which my attentiveness caused her. And next day, a day on which I had been resting all morning, when Françoise came in about noon to draw my curtains, she handed me a letter which had been left for me downstairs. I knew no one at Balbec. I had no doubt that the letter was from the milk-girl. Alas, it was only from Bergotte who, as he happened to be passing, had tried to see me, but on hearing that I was asleep had scribbled a few charming lines for which the lift-boy had addressed an envelope which I had supposed to have been written by the milk-girl. I was bitterly disappointed, and the thought that it was more difficult, and more flattering to myself to get a letter from Bergotte did not in the least console me for this particular letter's not being from her. As for the girl, I never came across her again any more than I came across those whom I had seen only from Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage. Seeing and then losing them all thus increased the state of agitation in which I was living, and I found a certain wisdom in the philosophers who recommend us to set a limit to our desires (if, that is, they refer to our desire for people, for that is the only kind that ends in anxiety, having for its object a being at once unknown and unconscious. To suppose that philosophy could refer to the desire for wealth would be too silly.). At the same time I was inclined to regard this wisdom as incomplete, for I said to myself that these encounters made me find even more beautiful a world which thus caused to grow along all the country roads flowers at once rare and common, fleeting treasures of the day, windfalls of the drive, of which the contingent circumstances that would never, perhaps, recur had alone prevented me from taking advantage, and which gave a new zest to life.

But perhaps in hoping that, one day, with greater freedom, I should be able to find on other roads girls much the same, I was already beginning to falsify and corrupt what there is exclusively individual in the desire to live in the company of a woman whom one has found attractive, and by the mere fact that I admitted the possibility of making this desire grow artificially, I had implicitly acknowledged my allusion.

The day on which Mme. de Villeparisis took us to Carqueville, where there was that church, covered in ivy, of which she had spoken to us, a church that, built upon rising ground, dominated both its village and the river that flowed beneath it, and had kept its own little bridge from the middle ages, my grandmother, thinking that I would like to be left alone to study the building at my leisure, suggested to her friend that they should go on and wait for me at the pastry-cook's, in the village square which was clearly visible from where we were and, in its mellow bloom in the sunshine, seemed like another part of a whole that was all mediaeval. It was arranged that I should join them there later. In the mass of verdure before which I was left standing I was obliged, if I was to discover the church, to make a mental effort which involved my grasping more intensely the idea 'Church'; in fact, as happens to schoolboys who gather more fully the meaning of a sentence when they are made, by translating or by paraphrasing it, to divest it of the forms to which they are accustomed, this idea of 'Church,' which as a rule I scarcely needed when I stood beneath steeples that were recognisable in themselves, I was obliged perpetually to recall so as not to forget, here that the arch in this clump of ivy was that of a pointed window, there that the projection of the leaves was due to the swelling underneath of a capital. Then came a breath of wind, and sent a tremor through the mobile porch, which was overrun by eddies that shot and quivered like a flood of light; the pointed leaves opened one against another; and, shuddering, the arboreal front drew after it green pillars, undulant, caressed and fugitive.

As I came away from the church I saw by the old bridge a cluster of girls from the village who, probably because it was Sunday, were standing about in their best clothes, rallying the young men who went past. Not so well dressed as the others, but seeming to enjoy some ascendancy over them—for she scarcely answered when they spoke to her—with a more serious and a more determined air, there was a tall one who, hoisted upon the parapet of the bridge with her feet hanging down, was holding on her lap a small vessel full of fish which she had presumably just been catching. She had a tanned complexion, gentle eyes but with a look of contempt for her surroundings, a small nose, delicately and attractively modelled. My eyes rested upon her skin; and my lips, had the need arisen, might have believed that they had followed my eyes. But it was not only to her body that I should have liked to attain, there was also her person, which abode within her, and with which there is but one form of contact, namely to attract its attention, but one sort of penetration, to awaken an idea in it.

And this inner self of the charming fisher-girl seemed to be still closed to me, I was doubtful whether I had entered it, even after I had seen my own image furtively reflect itself in the twin mirrors of her gaze, following an index of refraction that was as unknown to me as if I had been placed in the field of vision of a deer. But just as it would not have sufficed that my lips should find pleasure in hers without giving pleasure to them also, so I should have wished that the idea of me which was to enter this creature, was to fasten itself in her, should attract to me not merely her attention but her admiration, her desire, and should compel her to keep me in her memory until the day when I should be able to meet her again. Meanwhile I could see, within a stone's-throw, the square in which Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage must be waiting for me. I had not a moment to lose; and already I could feel that the girls were beginning to laugh at the sight of me thus held suspended before them. I had a five-franc piece in my pocket. I drew it out, and, before explaining to the girl the errand on which I proposed to send her, so as to have a better chance of her listening to me, I held the coin for a moment before her eyes.

"Since you seem to belong to the place," I said to her, "I wonder if you would be so good as to take a message for me. I want you to go to a pastry-cook's—which is apparently in a square, but I don't know where that is—where there is a carriage waiting for me. One moment! To make quite sure, will you ask if the carriage belongs to the Marquise de Villeparisis? But you can't miss it; it's a carriage and pair."

That was what I wished her to know, so that she should regard me as someone of importance. But when I had uttered the words 'Marquise' and 'carriage and pair,' suddenly I had a great sense of calm. I felt that the fisher-girl would remember me, and I felt vanishing, with my fear of not being able to meet her again, part also of my desire to meet her. It seemed to me that I had succeeded in touching her person with invisible lips, and that I had pleased her. And this assault and capture of her mind, this immaterial possession had taken from her part of her mystery, just as physical possession does.

We came down towards Hudimesnil; suddenly I was overwhelmed with that profound happiness which I had not often felt since Combray; happiness analogous to that which had been given me by—among other things—the steeples of Martinville. But this time it remained incomplete. I had just seen, standing a little way back from the steep ridge over which we were passing, three trees, probably marking the entrance to a shady avenue, which made a pattern at which I was looking now not for the first time; I could not succeed in reconstructing the place from which they had been, as it were, detached, but I felt that it had been familiar to me once; so that my mind having wavered between some distant year and the present moment, Balbec and its surroundings began to dissolve and I asked myself whether the whole of this drive were not a make-believe, Balbec a place to which I had never gone save in imagination, Mme. de Villeparisis a character in a story and the three old trees the reality which one recaptures on raising one's eyes from the book which one has been reading and which describes an environment into which one has come to believe that one has been bodily transported.

I looked at the three trees; I could see them plainly, but my mind felt that they were concealing something which it had not grasped, as when things are placed out of our reach, so that our fingers, stretched out at arm's-length, can only touch for a moment their outer surface, and can take hold of nothing. Then we rest for a little while before thrusting out our arm with refreshed vigour, and trying to reach an inch or two farther. But if my mind was thus to collect itself, to gather strength, I should have to be alone. What would I not have given to be able to escape as I used to do on those walks along the Guermantes way, when I detached myself from my parents! It seemed indeed that I ought to do so now. I recognised that kind of pleasure which requires, it is true, a certain effort on the part of the mind, but in comparison with which the attractions of the inertia which inclines us to renounce that pleasure seem very slight. That pleasure, the object of which I could but dimly feel, that pleasure which I must create for myself, I experienced only on rare occasions, but on each of these it seemed to me that the things which had happened in the interval were of but scant importance, and that in attaching myself to the reality of that pleasure alone I could at length begin to lead a new life. I laid my hand for a moment across my eyes, so as to be able to shut them without Mme. de Villeparisis's noticing. I sat there, thinking of nothing, then with my thoughts collected, compressed and strengthened I sprang farther forward in the direction of the trees, or rather in that inverse direction at the end of which I could see them growing within myself. I felt again behind them the same object, known to me and yet vague, which I could not bring nearer. And yet all three of them, as the carriage moved on, I could see coming towards me. Where had I looked at them before? There was no place near Combray where an avenue opened off the road like that. The site which they recalled to me, there was no room for it either in the scenery of the place in Germany where I had gone one year with my grandmother to take the waters. Was I to suppose, then, that they came from years already so remote in my life that the landscape which accompanied them had been entirely obliterated from my memory, and that, like the pages which, with sudden emotion, we recognise in a book which we imagined that we had never read, they surged up by themselves out of the forgotten chapter of my earliest infancy? Were they not rather to be numbered among those dream landscapes, always the same, at least for me in whom their unfamiliar aspect was but the objectivation in my dreams of the effort that I had been making while awake either to penetrate the mystery of a place beneath the outward appearance of which I was dimly conscious of there being something more, as had so often happened to me on the Guermantes way, or to succeed in bringing mystery back to a place which I had longed to know and which, from the day on which I had come to know it, had seemed to me to be wholly superficial, like Balbec? Or were they but an image freshly extracted from a dream of the night before, but already so worn, so altered that it seemed to me to come from somewhere far more distant? Or had I indeed never seen them before; did they conceal beneath their surface, like the trees, like the tufts of grass that I had seen beside the Guermantes way, a meaning as obscure, as hard to grasp as is a distant past, so that, whereas they are pleading with me that I would master a new idea, I imagined that I had to identify something in my memory? Or again were they concealing no hidden thought, and was it simply my strained vision that made me see them double in time as one occasionally sees things double in space? I could not tell. And yet all the time they were coming towards me; perhaps some fabulous apparition, a ring of witches or of norns who would propound their oracles to me. I chose rather to believe that they were phantoms of the past, dear companions of my childhood, vanished friends who recalled our common memories. Like ghosts they seemed to be appealing to me to take them with me, to bring them back to life. In their simple, passionate gesticulation I could discern the helpless anguish of a beloved person who has lost the power of speech, and feels that he will never be able to say to us what he wishes to say and we can never guess. Presently, at a cross-roads, the carriage left them. It was bearing me away from what alone I believed to be true, what would have made me truly happy; it was like my life.

I watched the trees gradually withdraw, waving their despairing arms, seeming to say to me: "What you fail to learn from us to-day, you will never know. If you allow us to drop back into the hollow of this road from which we sought to raise ourselves up to you, a whole part of yourself which we were bringing to you will fall for ever into the abyss." And indeed if, in the course of time, I did discover the kind of pleasure and of disturbance which I had just been feeling once again, and if one evening—too late, but then for all time—I fastened myself to it, of those trees themselves I was never to know what they had been trying to give me nor where else I had seen them. And when, the road having forked and the carriage with it, I turned my back on them and ceased to see them, with Mme. de Villeparisis asking me what I was dreaming about, I was as wretched as though I had just lost a friend, had died myself, had broken faith with the dead or had denied my God.

It was time to be thinking of home. Mme. de Villeparisis, who had a certain feeling for nature, colder than that of my grandmother but capable of recognising, even outside museums and noblemen's houses, the simple and majestic beauty of certain old and venerable things, told her coachman to take us back by the old Balbec road, a road little used but planted with old elm-trees which we thought quite admirable.

Once we had got to know this road, for a change we would return—that is, if we had not taken it on the outward journey—by another which ran through the woods of Chantereine and Canteloup. The invisibility of the numberless birds that took up one another's song close beside us in the trees gave me the same sense of being at rest that one has when one shuts one's eyes. Chained to my back-seat like Prometheus on his rock I listened to my Oceanides. And when it so happened that I caught a glimpse of one of those birds as it passed from one leaf to another, there was so little apparent connexion between it and the songs that I heard that I could not believe that I was beholding their cause in that little body, fluttering, startled and unseeing.

This road was like many others of the same kind which are to be found in France, climbing on a fairly steep gradient to its summit and then gradually falling for the rest of the way. At the time, I found no great attraction in it, I was only glad to be going home. But it became for me later on a frequent source of joy by remaining in my memory as a lodestone to which all the similar roads that I was to take, on walks or drives or journeys, would at once attach themselves without breach of continuity and would be able, thanks to it, to communicate directly with my heart. For as soon as the carriage or the motor-car turned into one of these roads that seemed to be merely the continuation of the road along which I had driven with Mme. de Villeparisis, the matter to which I found my consciousness directly applying itself, as to the most recent event in my past, would be (all the intervening years being quietly obliterated) the impressions that I had had on those bright summer afternoons and evenings, driving round Balbec, when the leaves smelt good, a mist rose from the ground, and beyond the village close at hand one could see through the trees the sun setting as though it had been merely some place farther along the road, a forest place and distant, which we should not have time to reach that evening. Harmonised with what I was feeling now in another place, on a similar road, surrounded by all the accessory sensations of breathing deep draughts of air, of curiosity, indolence, appetite, lightness of heart which were common to them both, and excluding all others, these impressions would be reinforced, would take on the consistency of a particular type of pleasure, and almost of a setting of life which, as it happened, I rarely had the luck to come across, but in which these awakened memories placed, amid the reality that my senses could perceive, no small part of a reality suggested, dreamed, unseizable, to give me, among those regions through which I was passing, more than an aesthetic feeling, a transient but exalted ambition to stay there and to live there always. How often since then, simply because I could smell green leaves, has not being seated on a back-seat opposite Mme. de Villeparisis, meeting the Princesse de Luxembourg who waved a greeting to her from her own carriage, coming back to dinner at the Grand Hotel appeared to me as one of those indescribable happinesses which neither the present nor the future can restore to us, which we may taste once only in a lifetime.

Often dusk would have fallen before we reached the hotel. Timidly I would quote to Mme. de Villeparisis, pointing to the moon in the sky, some memorable expression of Chateaubriand or Vigny or Victor Hugo: 'Shedding abroad that ancient secret of melancholy' or 'Weeping like Diana by the brink of her streams' or 'The shadows nuptial, solemn and august.'

"And so you think that good, do you?" she would ask, "inspired, as you call it. I must confess that I am always surprised to see people taking things seriously nowadays which the friends of those gentlemen, while doing ample justice to their merits, were the first to laugh at. People weren't so free then with the word 'inspired' as they are now, when if you say to a writer that he has mere talent he thinks you're insulting him. You quote me a fine passage from M. de Chateaubriand about moonlight. You shall see that I have my own reasons for being refractory. M. de Chateaubriand used constantly to come to see my father. He was quite a pleasant person when you were alone with him, because then he was simple and amusing, but the moment he had an audience he would begin to pose, and then he became absurd; when my father was in the room, he pretended that he had flung his resignation in the King's face, and that he had controlled the voting in the Conclave, forgetting that it was my father whom he had asked to beg the King to take him back, and that my father had heard him make the most idiotic forecasts of the Papal election. You ought to have heard M. de Blacas on that famous Conclave; he was a very different kind of man from M. de Chateaubriand. As to his fine phrases about the moon, they became part of our regular programme for entertaining our guests. Whenever there was any moonlight about the house, if there was anyone staying with us for the first time he would be told to take M. de Chateaubriand for a stroll after dinner. When they came in, my father would take his guest aside and say: 'Well, and was M. de Chateaubriand very eloquent?'—'Oh, yes.' 'He's been talking about the moon?'—'Yes, how did you know?'—'One moment, didn't he say——' and then my father would quote the passage. 'He did; but how in the world . . . ?'—'And he spoke to you of the moonlight on the Roman Campagna?'—'But, my dear sir, you're a magician.' My father was no magician, but M. de Chateaubriand had the same little speech about the moon which he served up every time."

At the mention of Vigny she laughed: "The man who said: 'I am the Comte Alfred de Vigny!' One either is a Comte or one isn't; it is not of the slightest importance." And then perhaps she discovered that it was after all, of some slight importance, for she went on: "For one thing I am by no means sure that he was, and in any case he was of the humblest origin, that gentleman who speaks in his verses of his 'Esquire's crest.' In such charming taste, is it not, and so interesting to his readers! Like Musset, a plain Paris cit, who laid so much stress on 'The golden falcon that surmounts my helm.' As if you would ever hear a real gentleman say a thing like that! And yet Musset had some talent as a poet. But except *Cinq-Mars* I have never been able to read a thing by M. de Vigny. I get so bored that the book falls from my hands. M. Molé, who had all the cleverness and tact that were wanting in M. de Vigny, put him properly in his place when he welcomed him to the Academy. Do you mean to say you don't know the speech? It is a masterpiece of irony and impertinence." She found fault with Balzac, whom she was surprised to see her nephews admire, for having pretended to describe a society 'in which he was never received' and of which his descriptions were wildly improbable. As for Victor Hugo, she told us that M. de Bouillon, her father, who had friends among the young leaders of the Romantic movement, had been taken by some of them to the first performance of *Hernani*, but that he had been unable to sit through it, so ridiculous had he found the lines of that talented but extravagant writer who had acquired the title of 'Major Poet' only by virtue of having struck a bargain, and as a reward for the not disinterested indulgence that he shewed to the dangerous errors of the Socialists.

We had now come in sight of the hotel, with its lights, so hostile that first evening, on our arrival, now protecting and kind, speaking to us of home. And when the carriage drew up outside the door, the porter, the pages, the lift-boy, attentive, clumsy, vaguely uneasy at our lateness, were numbered, now that they had grown familiar, among those beings who change so many times in the course of our life, as we ourself change, but by whom, when they are for the time being the mirror of our habits, we find something attractive in the feeling that we are being faithfully reflected and in a friendly spirit. We prefer them to friends whom we have not seen for some time, for they contain more of what we actually are. Only the outside page, exposed to the sun all day, had been taken indoors for protection from the cold night air and swaddled in thick woollen garments which, combined with the orange effulgence of his locks and the curiously red bloom of his cheeks, made one, seeing him there through the glass front of the hall, think of a hot-house plant muffled up for protection from the frost. We got out of the carriage, with the help of a great many more servants than were required, but they were conscious of the importance of the scene and each felt obliged to take some part in it. I was always very hungry. And so, often, so as not to keep dinner waiting, I would not go upstairs first to the room which had succeeded in becoming so really mine that to catch sight of its long violet curtains and low bookcases was to find myself alone again with that self of which things, like people, gave me a reflected image; but we would all wait together in the hall until the head waiter came to tell us that our dinner was ready. And this gave us another opportunity of listening to Mme. de Villeparisis.

"But you must be tired of us by now," protested my grandmother.

"Not at all! Why, I am delighted, what could be nicer?" replied her friend with a winning smile, drawing out, almost intoning her words in a way that contrasted markedly with her customary simplicity of speech.

And indeed at such moments as this she was not natural, her mind reverted to her early training, to the aristocratic manner in which a great lady is supposed to shew common people that she is glad to see them, that she is not at all stiff. And her one and only failure in true politeness lay in this excess of politeness; which it was easy to identify as one of the professional 'wrinkles' of a lady of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, who, always seeing in her humbler friends the latent discontent that she must one day arouse in their bosoms, greedily seizes every opportunity on which she can possibly, in the ledger in which she keeps her social account with them, write down a credit balance which will allow her to enter presently on the opposite page the dinner or reception to which she will not invite them. And so, having long ago taken effect in her once and for all, and ignoring the fact that now both the circumstances and the people concerned were different, that in Paris she hoped to see us often come to her house, the spirit of her caste was urging Mme. de Villeparisis on with feverish ardour, and as if the time that was allowed her for being kind to us was limited, to multiply, while we were still at Balbec, her gifts of roses and melons, loans of books, drives in her carriage and verbal effusions. And for that reason, quite as much as the dazzling glories of the beach, the many-coloured flamboyance and subaqueous light of the rooms, as much even as the riding-lessons by which tradesmen's sons were deified like Alexander of Macedon, the daily kindnesses shewn us by Mme. de Villeparisis and also the unaccustomed, momentary, holiday ease with which my grandmother accepted them have remained in my memory as typical of life at a watering-place.

"Give them your cloaks to take upstairs."

My grandmother handed hers to the manager, and because he had been so nice to me I was distressed by this want of consideration, which seemed to pain him.

"I think you've hurt his feelings," said the Marquise. "He probably fancies himself too great a gentleman to carry your wraps. I remember so well the Duc de Nemours, when I was still quite little, coming to see my father who was living then on the top floor of the Bouillon house, with a fat parcel under his arm of letters and newspapers. I can see the Prince now, in his blue coat, framed in our doorway, which had such pretty woodwork round it—I think it was Bagard made it—you know those fine laths that they used to cut, so supple that the joiner would twist them sometimes into little shells and flowers, like the ribbons round a nosegay. 'Here you are, Cyrus,' he said to my father, 'look what your porter's given me to bring you. He said to me: "Since you're going up to see the Count, it's not worth my while climbing all those stairs; but take care you don't break the string." ' Now that you have got rid of your things, why don't you sit down; look, sit in this seat," she said to my grandmother, taking her by the hand.

"Oh, if you don't mind, not in that one! There is not room for two, and it's too big for me by myself; I shouldn't feel comfortable."

"You remind me, for it was exactly like this, of a seat that I had for many years until at last I couldn't keep it any longer because it had been given to my mother by the poor Duchesse de Praslin. My mother, though she was the simplest person in the world, really, had ideas that belonged to another generation, which even in those days I could scarcely understand; and at first she had not been at all willing to let herself be introduced to Mme. de Praslin, who had been plain Mlle. Sebastiani, while she, because she was a Duchess, felt that it was not for her to be introduced to my mother. And really, you know," Mme. de Villeparisis went on, forgetting that she herself did not understand these fine shades of distinction, "even if she had just been Mme. de Choiseul, there was a good deal to be said for her claim. The Choiseuls are everything you could want; they spring from a sister of Louis the Fat; they were ruling princes down in Basigny. I admit that we beat them in marriages and in distinction, but the precedence is pretty much the same. This little difficulty gave rise to several amusing incidents, such as a luncheon party which was kept waiting a whole hour or more before one of these ladies could make up her mind to let herself be introduced to the other. In spite of which they became great friends, and she gave my mother a seat like that, in which people always refused to sit, just as you did, until one day my mother heard a carriage drive into the courtyard. She asked a young servant we had, who it was. 'The Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld, ma'am.' 'Very well, say that I am at home.' A quarter of an hour passed; no one came. 'What about the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld?' my mother asked. 'Where is she?' 'She's on the stairs, ma'am, getting her breath,' said the young servant, who had not been long up from the country, where my mother had the excellent habit of getting all her servants. Often she had seen them born. That's the only way to get really good ones. And they're the rarest of luxuries. And sure enough the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld had the greatest difficulty in getting upstairs, for she was an enormous woman, so enormous, indeed, that when she did come into the room my mother was quite at a loss for a moment to know where to put her. And then the seat that Mme. de Praslin had given her caught her eye. 'Won't you sit down?' she said, bringing it forward. And the Duchess filled it from side to side. She was quite a pleasant woman, for all her massiveness. 'She still creates an effect when she comes in,' one of our friends said once. 'She certainly creates an effect when she goes out,' said my mother, who was rather more free in her speech than would be thought proper nowadays. Even in Mme. de La Rochefoucauld's own drawing-room people weren't afraid to make fun of her to her face (at which she was always the first to laugh) over her ample proportions. 'But are you all alone?' my grandmother once asked M. de La Rochefoucauld, when she had come to pay a call on the Duchess, and being met at the door by him had not seen his wife who was at the other end of the room. 'Is Mme. de La Rochefoucauld not at home? I don't see her.'—'How charming of you!' replied the Duke, who had about the worst judgment of any man I have ever known, but was not altogether lacking in humour."

After dinner, when I had retired upstairs with my grandmother, I said to her that the qualities which attracted us in Mme. de Villeparisis, her tact, her shrewdness, her discretion, her modesty in not referring to herself, were not, perhaps, of very great value since those who possessed them in the highest degree were simply people like Molé and Loménie, and that if the want of them can make our social relations unpleasant yet it did not prevent from becoming Chateaubriand, Vigny, Hugo, Balzac, a lot of foolish fellows who had no judgment, at whom it was easy to mock, like Bloch. . . . But at the name of Bloch, my grandmother cried out in protest. And she began to praise Mme. de Villeparisis. As we are told that it is the preservation of the species which guides our individual preferences in love, and, so that the child may be constituted in the most normal fashion, sends fat men in pursuit of lean women and *vice versa*, so in some dim way it was the requirements of my happiness threatened by my disordered nerves, by my morbid tendency to melancholy, to solitude, that made her allot the highest place to the qualities of balance and judgment, peculiar not only to Mme. de Villeparisis but to a society in which our ancestors saw blossom the minds of a Doudan, a M. de Rémusat, not to mention a

Beausergent, a Joubert, a Sévigné, a type of mind that invests life with more happiness, with greater dignity than the converse refinements which brought a Baudelaire, a Poe, a Verlaine, a Rimbaud to sufferings, to a disrepute such as my grandmother did not wish for her daughter's child. I interrupted her with a kiss and asked her if she had noticed some expression which Mme. de Villeparisis had used and which seemed to point to a woman who thought more of her noble birth than she was prepared to admit. In this way I used to submit my impressions of life to my grandmother, for I was never certain what degree of respect was due to anyone until she had informed me. Every evening I would come to her with the mental sketches that I had made during the day of all those non-existent people who were not her. Once I said to her: "I shouldn't be able to live without you." "But you mustn't speak like that;" her voice was troubled. "We must harden our hearts more than that, you know. Or what would become of you if I went away on a journey? But I hope that you would be quite sensible and quite happy."

"I could manage to be sensible if you went away for a few days, but I should count the hours."

"But if I were to go away for months . . ." (at the bare suggestion of such a thing my heart was wrung) ". . . for years . . . for . . ."

We both remained silent. We dared not look one another in the face. And yet I was suffering more keenly from her anguish than from my own. And so I walked across to the window, and said to her, with a studied clearness of tone but with averted eyes:

"You know what a creature of habit I am. For the first few days after I have been parted from the people I love best, I am wretched. But though I go on loving them just as much, I grow used to their absence; life becomes calm, bearable, pleasant; I could stand being parted from them for months, for years . . ."

I was obliged to stop, and looked straight out of the window. My grandmother went out of the room for something. But next day I began to talk to her about philosophy, and, speaking in a tone of complete indifference, but at the same time taking care that my grandmother should pay attention to what I was saying, I remarked what a curious thing it was that, according to the latest scientific discoveries, the materialist position appeared to be crumbling, and the most likely thing to be, once again, the survival of the soul and reunion in a life everlasting.

Mme. de Villeparisis gave us warning that presently she would not be able to see so much of us. A young nephew who was preparing for Saumur, and was meanwhile stationed in the neighbourhood, at Doncières, was coming to spend a few weeks' furlough with her, and she would be devoting most of her time to him. In the course of our drives together she had boasted to us of his extreme cleverness, and above all of his goodness of heart; already I was imagining that he would have an instinctive feeling for me, that I was to be his best friend; and when, before his arrival, his aunt gave my grandmother to understand that he had unfortunately fallen into the clutches of an appalling woman with whom he was quite infatuated and who would never let him go, since I believed that that sort of love was doomed to end in mental aberration, crime and suicide, thinking how short the time was that was set apart for our friendship, already so great in my heart, although I had not yet set eyes on him, I wept for that friendship and for the misfortunes that were in store for it, as we weep for a person whom we love when some one has just told us that he is seriously ill and that his days are numbered.

One afternoon of scorching heat I was in the dining-room of the hotel, which they had plunged in semi-darkness, to shield it from the glare, by drawing the curtains which the sun gilded, while through the gaps between them I caught flashing blue glimpses of the sea, when along the central gangway leading inland from the beach to the high road I saw, tall, slender, his head held proudly erect upon a springing neck, a young man go past with searching eyes, whose skin was as fair and whose hair as golden as if they had absorbed all the rays of the sun. Dressed in a clinging, almost white material such as I could never have believed that any man would have the audacity to wear, the thinness of which suggested no less vividly than the coolness of the dining-room the heat and brightness of the glorious day outside, he was walking fast. His eyes, from one of which a monocle kept dropping, were of the colour of the sea. Everyone looked at him with interest as he passed, knowing that this young Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray was famed for the smartness of his clothes. All the newspapers had described the suit in which he had recently acted as second to the young Duc d'Uzès in a duel. One felt that this so special quality of his hair, his eyes, his skin, his figure, which would have marked him out in a crowd like a precious vein of opal, azure-shot and luminous, embedded in a mass of coarser substance, must correspond to a life different from that led by other men. So that when, before the attachment which Mme. de Villeparisis had been deploring, the prettiest women in society had disputed the possession of him, his presence, at a watering-place for instance, in the company of the beauty of the season to whom he was paying court, not only made her conspicuous, but attracted every eye fully as much to himself. Because of his 'tone,' of his impertinence befitting a young 'lion,' and especially of his astonishing good looks, some people even thought him effeminate, though without attaching any stigma, for everyone knew how manly he was and that he was a passionate 'womaniser.' This was Mme. de Villeparisis's nephew of whom she had spoken to us. I was overcome with joy at the thought that I was going to know him and to see him for several weeks on end, and confident that he would bestow on me all his affection. He strode rapidly across the hotel, seeming to be in pursuit of his monocle, which kept darting away in front of him like a butterfly. He was coming from the beach, and the sea which filled the lower half of the glass front of the hall gave him a background against which he was drawn at full length, as in certain portraits whose painters attempt, without in anyway falsifying the most accurate observation of contemporary life, but by choosing for their sitter appropriate surroundings, a polo ground, golf links, a racecourse, the bridge of a yacht, to furnish a modern equivalent of those canvases on which the old masters used to present the human figure in the foreground of a landscape. A carriage and pair was waiting for him at the door; and, while his monocle resumed its gambollings in the air of the sunlit street, with the elegance and mastery which a great pianist contrives to display in the simplest piece of execution, where it has not appeared possible that he could shew himself superior to a performer of the second class, Mme. de Villeparisis's nephew, taking the reins that were handed him by the groom, jumped on to the box seat by his side and, while he opened a letter which the manager of the hotel sent out after him, made his horses start.

What a disappointment was mine on the days that followed, when, each time that I met him outside or in the hotel—his head erect, perpetually balancing the movements of his limbs round the fugitive and dancing monocle which seemed to be their centre of gravity—I was forced to admit that he had evidently no desire to make our acquaintance, and saw that he did not bow to us although he must have known that we were friends of his aunt. And calling to mind the friendliness that Mme. de Villeparisis, and before her M. de Norpois, had shewn me, I thought that perhaps they were only of a bogus nobility, and that there might be a secret section in the laws that govern the aristocracy which allowed women, perhaps, and certain diplomats to discard, in their relations with plebeians, for a reason which was beyond me, the stiffness which must, on the other hand, be pitilessly maintained by a young Marquis. My intelligence might have told me the opposite. But the characteristic feature of the silly phase through which I was passing—a phase by no means irresponsive, indeed highly fertile—is that we do not consult our intelligence and that the most trivial attributes of other people seem to us then to form an inseparable part of their personality. In a world thronged with monsters and with gods, we are barely conscious of tranquillity. There is hardly one of the actions which we performed in that phase which we would not give anything, in later life, to be able to erase from our memory. Whereas what we ought to regret is that we no longer possess the spontaneity which made us perform them. In later life we look at things in a more practical way, in full conformity with the rest of society, but youth was the only time in which we learned anything.

This insolence which I surmised in M. de Saint-Loup, and all that it implied of ingrained severity, received confirmation from his attitude whenever he passed us, his body as inflexibly erect, his head always held as high, his gaze as impassive, or rather, I should say, as implacable, devoid of that vague respect which one has for the rights of other people, even if they do not know one's aunt, one example of which was that I did not look in quite the same way at an old lady as at a gas lamp. These frigid manners were as far removed from the charming letters which, but a few days since, I had still been imagining him as writing to tell me of his regard for myself, as is removed from the enthusiasm of the Chamber and of the populace which he has been picturing himself as rousing by an imperishable speech, the humble, dull, obscure position of the dreamer who, after pondering it thus by himself, for himself, aloud, finds himself, once the imaginary applause has died away, just the same Tom, Dick or Harry as before. When Mme. de Villeparisis, doubtless in an attempt to counteract the bad impression that had been made on us by an exterior indicative of an arrogant and evil nature, spoke to us again of the inexhaustible goodness of her great-nephew (he was the son of one of her nieces, and a little older than myself), I marvelled how the world, with an utter disregard of truth, ascribes tenderness of heart to people whose hearts are in reality so hard and dry, provided only that they behave with common courtesy to the brilliant members of their own sets. Mme. de Villeparisis herself confirmed, though indirectly, my diagnosis, which was already a conviction, of the essential points of her nephew's character one day when I met them both coming along a path so narrow that there was nothing for it but to introduce me to him. He seemed not to hear that a person's name was being repeated to him, not a muscle of his face moved; his eyes, in which there shone not the faintest gleam of human sympathy, shewed merely in the insensibility, in the inanity of their gaze an exaggeration failing which there would have been nothing to distinguish them from lifeless mirrors. Then fastening on me those hard eyes, as though he wished to make sure of me before returning my salute, by an abrupt release which seemed to be due rather to a reflex action of his muscles than to an exercise of will, keeping between himself and me the greatest possible interval, he stretched his arm out to its full extension and, at the end of it, offered me his hand. I supposed that it must mean, at the very least, a duel when, next day, he sent me his card. But he spoke to me only of literature, declared after a long talk that he would like immensely to spend several hours with me every day. He had not only, in this encounter, given proof of an ardent zest for the things of the spirit, he had shewn a regard for myself which was little in keeping with his greeting of me the day before. After I had seen him repeat the same process whenever anyone was introduced to him, I realised that it was simply a social usage peculiar to his branch of the family, to which his mother, who had seen to it that he should be perfectly brought up, had moulded his limbs; he went through those motions without thinking, any more than he thought about his beautiful clothes or hair; they were a thing devoid of the moral significance which I had at first ascribed to them, a thing purely acquired like that other habit that he had of at once demanding an introduction to the family of anyone whom he knew, which had become so instinctive in him that, seeing me again the day after our talk, he fell upon me and without asking how I did begged me to make him known to my grandmother, who was with me, with the same feverish haste as if the request had been due to some instinct of self-preservation, like the act of warding off a blow, or of shutting one's eyes to avoid a stream of boiling water, without which precautions it would have been dangerous to stay where one was a moment longer.

The first rites of exorcism once performed, as a wicked fairy discards her outer form and endures all the most enchanting graces, I saw this disdainful creature become the most friendly, the most considerate young man that I had ever met. "Good," I said to myself, "I've been mistaken about him once already; I was taken in by a mirage; but I have corrected the first only to fall into a second, for he must be a great gentleman who has grown sick of his nobility and is trying to hide it." As a matter of fact it was not long before all the exquisite breeding, all the friendliness of Saint-Loup were indeed to let me see another creature but one very different from what I had suspected.

This young man who had the air of a scornful, sporting aristocrat had in fact no respect, no interest save for and in the things of the spirit, and especially those modern manifestations of literature and art which seemed so ridiculous to his aunt; he was imbued, moreover, with what she called 'Socialistic spoutings,' was filled with the most profound contempt for his caste and spent long hours in the study of Nietzsche and Proudhon. He was one of those intellectuals, quick to admire what is good, who shut themselves up in a book, and are interested only in pure thought. Indeed in Saint-Loup the expression of this highly abstract tendency, which removed him so far from my customary preoccupations, while it seemed to me touching, also annoyed me not a little. I may say that when I realised properly who had been his father, on days when I had been reading memoirs rich in anecdotes of that famous Comte de Marsantes, in whom were embodied the special graces of a generation already remote, the mind full of speculation—anxious to obtain fuller details of the life that M. de Marsantes had led, it used to infuriate me that Robert de Saint-Loup, instead of being content to be the son of his father, instead of being able to guide me through the old-fashioned romance of what had been that father's existence, had trained himself to enjoy Nietzsche and Proudhon. His father would not have shared my regret. He had been himself a man of brains, who had transcended the narrow confines of his life as a man of the world. He had hardly had time to know his son, but had hoped that his son would prove a better man than himself. And I really believe that, unlike the rest of the family, he would have admired his son, would have rejoiced at his abandoning what had been his own small diversions for austere meditations, and without saying a word, in his modesty as a great gentleman endowed with brains, he would have read in secret his son's favourite authors in order to appreciate how far Robert was superior to himself.

There was, however, this rather painful consideration: that if M. de Marsantes, with his extremely open mind, would have appreciated a son so different from himself, Robert de Saint-Loup, because he was one of those who believe that merit is attached only to certain forms of art and life, had an affectionate but slightly contemptuous memory of a father who had spent all his time hunting and racing, who yawned at Wagner and raved over Offenbach. Saint-Loup had not the intelligence to see that intellectual worth has nothing to do with adhesion to any one aesthetic formula, and had for the intellectuality of M. de Marsantes much the same sort of scorn as might have been felt for Boieldieu or Labiche by a son of Boieldieu or Labiche who had become adepts in the most symbolic literature and the most complex music. "I scarcely knew my father," he used to say. "He seems to have been a charming person. His tragedy was the deplorable age in which he lived. To have been born in the Faubourg Saint-Germain and to have to live in the days of La Belle Hélène would be enough to wreck any existence. Perhaps if he'd been some little shopkeeper mad about the Ring he'd have turned out quite different. Indeed they tell me that he was fond of literature. But that can never be proved, because literature to him meant such utterly god-forsaken books." And in my own case, if I found Saint-Loup a trifle earnest, he could not understand why I was not more earnest still. Never judging anything except by the weight of the intelligence that it contained, never perceiving the magic appeal to the imagination that I found in things which he condemned as frivolous, he was astonished that I—I, to whom he imagined himself to be so utterly inferior—could take any interest in them.

From the first Saint-Loup made a conquest of my grandmother, not only by the incessant acts of kindness which he went out of his way to shew to us both, but by the naturalness which he put into them as into everything. For naturalness—doubtless because through the artifice of man it allows a feeling of nature to permeate—was the quality which my grandmother preferred to all others, whether in gardens, where she did not like there to be, as there had been in our Combray garden, too formal borders, or at table, where she detested those dressed-up dishes in which you could hardly detect the foodstuffs that had gone to make them, or in piano-playing, which she did not like to be too finicking, too laboured, having indeed had a special weakness for the discords, the wrong notes of Rubinstein. This naturalness she found and enjoyed even in the clothes that Saint-Loup wore, of a pliant elegance, with nothing swagger, nothing formal about them, no stiffness or starch. She appreciated this rich young man still more highly for the free and careless way that he had of living in luxury without 'smelling of money,' without giving himself airs; she even discovered the charm of this naturalness in the incapacity which Saint-Loup had kept, though as a rule it is outgrown with childhood, at the same time as certain physiological peculiarities of that period, for preventing his face from at once reflecting every emotion. Something, for instance, that he wanted to have but had not expected, were it no more than a compliment, reacted in him in a burst of pleasure so quick, so burning, so volatile, so expansive that it was impossible for him to contain and to conceal it; a grin of delight seized irresistible hold of his face; the too delicate skin of his cheeks allowed a vivid glow to shine through them, his eyes sparkled with confusion and joy; and my grandmother was infinitely touched by this charming show of innocence and frankness, which, incidentally, in Saint-Loup—at any rate at the period of our first friendship—was not misleading. But I have known another person, and there are many such, in whom the physiological sincerity of that fleeting blush in no way excluded moral duplicity; as often as not it proves nothing more than the vivacity with which pleasure is felt—so that it disarms them and they are forced publicly to confess it—by natures capable of the vilest treachery. But where my grandmother did really adore Saint-Loup's naturalness was in his way of admitting, without any evasion, his affection for me, to give expression to which he found words than which she herself, she told me, could not have thought of any more appropriate, more truly loving, words to which 'Sévigné and Beausergent' might have set their signatures. He was not afraid to make fun of my weaknesses—which he had discerned with an acuteness that made her smile—but as she herself would have done, lovingly, at the same time extolling my good qualities with a warmth, an impulsive freedom that shewed no sign of the reserve, the coldness by means of which young men of his age are apt to suppose that they give themselves importance. And he shewed in forestalling every discomfort, however slight, in covering my legs if the day had turned cold without my noticing it, in arranging (without telling me) to stay later with me in the evening if he thought that I was depressed or felt unwell, a vigilance which, from the point of view of my health, for which a more hardening discipline would perhaps have been better, my grandmother found almost excessive, though as a proof of his affection for myself she was deeply touched by it.

It was promptly settled between us that he and I were to be great friends for ever, and he would say 'our friendship' as though he were speaking of some important and delightful thing which had an existence independent of ourselves, and which he soon called—not counting his love for his mistress—the great joy of his life. These words made me rather uncomfortable and I was at a loss for an answer, for I did not feel when I was with him and talked to him—and no doubt it would have been the same with everyone else—any of that happiness which it was, on the other hand, possible for me to experience when I was by myself. For alone, at times, I felt surging from the depths of my being one or other of those impressions which gave me a delicious sense of comfort. But as soon as I was with some one else, when I began to talk to a friend, my mind at once 'turned about,' it was towards the listener and not myself that it directed its thoughts, and when they followed this outward course they brought me no pleasure. Once I had left Saint-Loup, I managed, with the help of words, to put more or less in order the confused minutes that I had spent with him; I told myself that I had a good friend, that a good friend was a rare thing, and I tasted, when I felt myself surrounded by 'goods' that were difficult to acquire, what was precisely the opposite of the pleasure that was natural to me, the opposite of the pleasure of having extracted from myself and brought to light something that was hidden in my inner darkness. If I had spent two or three hours in conversation with Saint-Loup, and he had expressed his admiration of what I had said to him, I felt a sort of remorse, or regret, or weariness at not having been left alone and ready, at last, to begin my work. But I told myself that one is not given intelligence for one's own benefit only, that the greatest of men have longed for appreciation, that I could not regard as wasted hours in which I had built up an exalted idea of myself in the mind of my friend; I had no difficulty in persuading myself that I ought to be happy in consequence, and I hoped all the more anxiously that this happiness might never be taken from me simply because I had not yet been conscious of it. We fear more than the loss of everything else the disappearance of the 'goods' that have remained beyond our reach, because our heart has not taken possession of them. I felt that I was capable of exemplifying the virtues of friendship better than most people (because I should always place the good of my friends before those personal interests to which other people were devoted but which did not count for me), but not of finding happiness in a feeling which, instead of multiplying the differences that there were between my nature and those of other people—as there are among all of us—would cancel them. At the same time my mind was distinguishing in Saint-Loup a personality more collective than his own, that of the 'noble'; which like an indwelling spirit moved his limbs, ordered his gestures and his actions; then, at such moments, although in his company, I was as much alone as I should have been gazing at a landscape the harmony of which I could understand. He was no more then than an object the properties of which, in my musing contemplations, I sought to explore. The perpetual discovery in him of this pre-existent, this aeonial creature, this aristocrat who was just what Robert aspired not to be, gave me a keen delight, but one that was intellectual and not social. In the moral and physical agility which gave so much grace to his kindnesses, in the ease with which he offered my grandmother his carriage and made her get into it, in the alacrity with which he sprang from the box, when he was afraid that I might be cold, to spread his own cloak over my shoulders, I felt not only the inherited litheness of the mighty hunters who had been for generations the ancestors of this young man who made no pretence save to intellectuality, their scorn of wealth which, subsisting in him side by side with his enjoyment of it simply because it enabled him to entertain his friends more lavishly, made him so carelessly shower his riches at their feet; I felt in him especially the certainty or the illusion in the minds of those great lords of being 'better than other people,' thanks to which they had not been able to hand down to Saint-Loup that anxiety to shew that one is 'just as good,' that dread of seeming inferior, of which he was indeed wholly unconscious, but which mars with so much ugliness, so much awkwardness, the most sincere overtures of a plebeian. Sometimes I found fault with myself for thus taking pleasure in my friend as in a work of art, that is to say in regarding the play of all the parts of his being as harmoniously ordered by a general idea from which they depended but which he did not know, so that it added nothing to his own good qualities, to that personal value, intellectual and moral, to which he attached so high a price.

And yet that idea was to a certain extent their determining cause. It was because he was a gentleman that that mental activity, those socialist aspirations, which made him seek the company of young students, arrogant and ill-dressed, connoted in him something really pure and disinterested which was not to be found in them. Looking upon himself as the heir of an ignorant and selfish caste, he was sincerely anxious that they should forgive in him that aristocratic origin which they, on the contrary, found irresistibly attractive and on account of which they sought to know him, though with a show of coldness and indeed of insolence towards him. He was thus led to make advances to people from whom my parents, faithful to the sociological theories of Combray, would have been stupefied at his not turning away in disgust. One day when we were sitting on the sands, Saint-Loup and I, we heard issuing from a canvas tent against which we were leaning a torrent of imprecation against the swarm of Israelites that infested Balbec. "You can't go a yard without meeting them," said the voice. "I am not in principle irremediably hostile to the Jewish nation, but here there is a plethora of them. You hear nothing but, 'I thay, Apraham, I've chust theen Chacop.' You would think you were in the Rue d'Aboukir." The man who thus inveighed against Israel emerged at last from the tent; we raised our eyes to behold this anti-Semite. It was my old friend Bloch. Saint-Loup at once begged me to remind him that they had met before the Board of Examiners, when Bloch had carried off the prize of honour, and since then at a popular university course.

At the most I may have smiled now and then, to discover in Robert the marks of his Jesuit schooling, in the awkwardness which the fear of hurting people's feelings at once created in him whenever one of his intellectual friends made a social error, did something silly to which Saint-Loup himself attached no importance but felt that the other would have blushed if anybody had noticed it. And it was Robert who used to blush as though it had been he that was to blame, for instance on the day when Bloch, after promising to come and see him at the hotel, went on:

"As I cannot endure to be kept waiting among all the false splendour of these great caravanserais, and the Hungarian band would make me ill, you must tell the 'lighft-boy' to make them shut up, and to let you know at once."

Personally, I was not particularly anxious that Bloch should come to the hotel. He was at Balbec not by himself, unfortunately, but with his sisters, and they in turn had innumerable relatives and friends staying there. Now this Jewish colony was more picturesque than pleasant. Balbec was in this respect like such countries as Russia or Rumania, where the geography books teach us that the Israelite population does not enjoy anything approaching the same esteem and has not reached the same stage of assimilation as, for instance, in Paris. Always together, with no blend of any other element, when the cousins and uncles of Bloch or their coreligionists male or female repaired to the Casino, the ladies to dance, the gentlemen branching off towards the baccarat-tables, they formed a solid troop, homogeneous within itself, and utterly dissimilar to the people who watched them go past and found them there again every year without ever exchanging a word or a sign with them, whether these were on the Cambremers' list, or the presiding magistrate's little group, professional or 'business' people, or even simple corn-chandlers from Paris, whose daughters, handsome, proud, derisive and French as the statues at Rheims, would not care to mix with that horde of ill-bred tomboys, who carried their zeal for 'seaside fashions' so far as to be always apparently on their way home from shrimping or out to dance the tango. As for the men, despite the brilliance of their dinner-jackets and patent-leather shoes, the exaggeration of their type made one think of what people call the 'intelligent research' of painters who, having to illustrate the Gospels or the Arabian Nights, consider the country in which the scenes are laid, and give to Saint Peter or to Ali-Baba the identical features of the heaviest 'punter' at the Balbec tables. Bloch introduced his sisters, who, though he silenced their chatter with the utmost rudeness, screamed with laughter at the mildest sallies of this brother, their blindly worshipped idol. So that it is probable that this set of people contained, like every other, perhaps more than any other, plenty of attractions, merits and virtues. But in order to experience these, one had first to penetrate its enclosure. Now it was not popular; it could feel this; it saw in its unpopularity the mark of an anti-semitism to which it presented a bold front in a compact and closed phalanx into which, as it happened, no one ever dreamed of trying to make his way.

At his use of the word 'lighft' I had all the less reason to be surprised in that, a few days before, Bloch having asked me why I had come to Balbec (although it seemed to him perfectly natural that he himself should be there) and whether it had been "in the hope of making grand friends," when I had explained to him that this visit was a fulfilment of one of my earliest longings, though one not so deep as my longing to see Venice, he had replied: "Yes, of course, to sip iced drinks with the pretty ladies, while you pretend to be reading the *Stones of Venighce*, by Lord John Ruskin, a dreary shaver, in fact one of the most garrulous old barbers that you could find." So that Bloch evidently thought that in England not only were all the inhabitants of the male sex called 'Lord,' but the letter 'i' was invariably pronounced 'igh.' As for Saint-Loup, this mistake in pronunciation seemed to him all the less serious inasmuch as he saw in it pre-eminently a want of those almost 'society' notions which my new friend despised as fully as he was versed in them. But the fear lest Bloch, discovering one day that one says 'Venice' and that Ruskin was not a lord, should retrospectively imagine that Robert had been laughing at him, made the latter feel as guilty as if he had been found wanting in the indulgence with which, as we have seen, he overflowed, so that the blush which would no doubt one day dye the cheek of Bloch on the discovery of his error, Robert already, by anticipation and reflex action, could feel mounting to his own. For he fully believed that Bloch attached more importance than he to this mistake. Which Bloch proved to be true some time later, when he heard me pronounce the word 'lift,' by breaking in with:

"Oh, you say 'lift,' do you?" And then, in a dry and lofty tone: "Not that it is of the slightest importance." A phrase that is like a reflex action of the body, the same in all men whose self-esteem is great, in the gravest circumstances as well as in the most trivial, betraying there as clearly as on this occasion how important the thing in question seems to him who declares that it is of no importance; a tragic phrase at times, the first to escape (and then how heart-breaking) the lips of every man at all proud from whom we have just taken the last hope to which he still clung by refusing to do him a service. "Oh, well, it's not of the slightest importance; I shall make some other arrangement:" the other arrangement which it is not of the slightest importance that he should be driven to adopt being often suicide.

Apart from this, Bloch made me the prettiest speeches. He was certainly anxious to be on the best of terms with me. And yet he asked me: "Is it because you've taken a fancy to raise yourself to the peerage that you run after de Saint-Loup-en-Bray? You must be going through a fine crisis of snobbery. Tell me, are you a snob? I think so, what?" Not that his desire to be friendly had suddenly changed. But what is called, in not too correct language, 'ill breeding' was his defect, and therefore the defect which he was bound to overlook, all the more that by which he did not believe that other people could be shocked. In the human race the frequency of the virtues that are identical in us all is not more wonderful than the multiplicity of the defects that are peculiar to each one of us. Undoubtedly, it is not common sense that is "the commonest thing in the world"; but human kindness. In the most distant, the most desolate ends of the earth, we marvel to see it blossom of its own accord, as in a remote valley a poppy like the poppies in the world beyond, poppies which it has never seen as it has never known aught but the wind that, now and again, stirring the folds of its scarlet cloak, disturbs its solitude. Even if this human kindness, paralysed by self-interest, is not exercised, it exists none the less, and whenever any inconstant egoist does not restrain its action, when, for example, he is reading a novel or a newspaper, it will bud, blossom, grow, even in the heart of him who, cold-blooded in real life, has retained a tender heart, as a lover of fiction, for the weak, the righteous and the persecuted. But the variety of our defects is no less remarkable than the similarity of our virtues. Each of us has his own, so much so that to continue loving him we are obliged not to take them into account but to ignore them and look only to the rest of his character. The most perfect person in the world has a certain defect which shocks us or makes us angry. One man is of rare intelligence, sees everything from an exalted angle, never speaks evil of anyone, but will pocket and forget letters of supreme importance which it was he himself who asked you to let him post for you, and will then miss a vital engagement without offering you any excuse, with a smile, because he prides himself upon never knowing the time. Another is so refined, so gentle, so delicate in his conduct that he never says anything about you before your face except what you are glad to hear; but you feel that he refrains from uttering, that he keeps buried in his heart, where they grow bitter, very different opinions, and the pleasure that he derives from seeing you is so dear to him that he will let you faint with exhaustion sooner than leave you to yourself. A third has more sincerity, but carries it so far that he feels bound to let you know, when you have pleaded the state of your health as an excuse for not having been to see him, that you were seen going to the theatre and were reported to be looking well, or else that he has not been able to profit entirely by the action which you have taken on his behalf, which, by the way, three other of his friends had already offered to take, so that he is only moderately indebted to you. In similar circumstances the previous friend would have pretended not to know that you had gone to the theatre, or that other people could have done him the same service. But this last friend feels himself obliged to repeat or to reveal to somebody the very thing that is most likely to give offence; is delighted with his own frankness and tells you, emphatically: "I am like that." While others infuriate you by their exaggerated curiosity, or by a want of curiosity so absolute that you can speak to them of the most sensational happenings without their grasping what it is all about; and others again take months to answer you if your letter has been about something that concerns yourself and not them, or else, if they write that they are coming to ask you for something and you dare not leave the house for fear of missing them, do not appear, but leave you in suspense for weeks because, not having received from you the answer which their letter did not in the least 'expect,' they have concluded that you must be cross with them. And others, considering their own wishes and not yours, talk to you without letting you get a word in if they are in good spirits and want to see you, however urgent the work you may have in hand, but if they feel exhausted by the weather or out of humour, you cannot get a word out of them, they meet your efforts with an inert languor and no more take the trouble to reply, even in monosyllables, to what you say to them than if they had not heard you. Each of our friends has his defects so markedly that to continue to love him we are obliged to seek consolation for those defects—in the thought of his talent, his goodness, his affection for ourself—or rather to leave them out of account, and for that we need to display all our good will. Unfortunately our obliging obstinacy in refusing to see the defect in our friend is surpassed by the obstinacy with which he persists in that defect, from his own blindness to it or the blindness that he attributes to other people. For he does not notice it himself, or imagines that it is not noticed. Since the risk of giving offence arises principally from the difficulty of appreciating what does and what does not pass unperceived, we ought, at least, from prudence, never to speak of ourselves, because that is a subject on which we may be sure that other people's views are never in accordance with our own. If we find as many surprises as on visiting a house of plain exterior which inside is full of hidden treasures, torture-chambers, skeletons, when we discover the true lives of other people, the real beneath the apparent universe, we are no less surprised if, in place of the image that we have made of ourself with the help of all the things that people have said to us, we learn from the terms in which they speak of us in our absence what an entirely different image they have been carrying in their own minds of us and of our life. So that whenever we have spoken about ourselves, we may be sure that our inoffensive and prudent words, listened to with apparent politeness and hypocritical approbation, have given rise afterwards to the most exasperated or the most mirthful, but in either case the least favourable, criticism. The least risk that we run is that of irritating people by the disproportion that there is between our idea of ourselves and the words that we use, a disproportion which as a rule makes people's talk about themselves as ludicrous as the performances of those self-styled music-lovers who when they feel the need to hum a favourite melody compensate for the inadequacy of their inarticulate murmurings by a strenuous mimicry and a look of admiration which is hardly justified by all that they let us hear. And to the bad habit of speaking about oneself and one's defects there must be added, as part of the same thing, that habit of denouncing in other people defects precisely analogous to one's own. For it is always of those defects that people speak, as though it were a way of speaking about oneself, indirectly, which added to the pleasure of absolution that of confession. Besides it seems that our attention, always attracted by what is characteristic of ourselves, notices that more than anything else in other people. One short-sighted man says of another: "But he can scarcely open his eyes!"; a consumptive has his doubts as to the pulmonary integrity of the most robust; an unwashed man speaks only of the baths that other people do not take; an evil-smelling man insists that other people smell; a cuckold sees cuckolds everywhere, a light woman light women, a snob snobs. Then, too, every vice, like every profession, requires and trains a special knowledge which we are never loath to display. The invert detects and denounces inverts; the tailor asked out to dine, before he has begun to talk to you, has passed judgment on the cloth of your coat, which his fingers are itching to feel, and if after a few words of conversation you were to ask a dentist what he really thought of you, he would tell you how many of your teeth wanted filling. To him nothing appears more important, nor more absurd to you who have noticed his own. And it is not only when we speak of ourselves that we imagine other people to be blind; we behave as though they were. On every one of us there is a special god in attendance who hides from him or promises him the concealment from other people of his defect, just as he stops the eyes and nostrils of people who do not wash to the streaks of dirt which they carry in their ears and the smell of sweat which emanates from their armpits, and assures them that they can with impunity carry both of these about a world that will notice nothing. And those who wear artificial pearls, or give them as presents, imagine that people will take them to be genuine. Bloch was ill-bred, neurotic, a snob, and, since he belonged to a family of little repute, had to support, as on the floor of ocean, the incalculable pressure that was imposed on him not only by the Christians upon the surface but by all the intervening layers of Jewish castes superior to his own, each of them crushing with its contempt the one that was immediately beneath it. To carve his way through to the open air by raising himself from Jewish family to Jewish family would have taken Bloch many thousands of years. It was better worth his while to seek an outlet in another direction.

When Bloch spoke to me of the crisis of snobbery through which I must be passing, and bade me confess that I was a snob, I might well have replied: "If I were, I should not be going about with you." I said merely that he was not being very polite. Then he tried to apologise, but in the way that is typical of the ill-bred man who is only too glad to hark back to whatever it was if he can find an opportunity to aggravate his offence. "Forgive me," he used now to plead, whenever we met, "I have vexed you, tormented you; I have been wantonly mischievous. And yet—man in general and your friend in particular is so singular an animal—you cannot imagine the affection that I, I who tease you so cruelly, have for you. It carries me often, when I think of you, to tears." And he gave an audible sob.

What astonished me more in Bloch than his bad manners was to find how the quality of his conversation varied. This youth, so hard to please that of authors who were at the height of their fame he would say: "He's a gloomy idiot; he's a sheer imbecile," would every now and then tell, with immense gusto, stories that were simply not funny or would instance as a 'really remarkable person' some man who was completely insignificant. This double scale of measuring the wit, the worth, the interest of people continued to puzzle me until I was introduced to M. Bloch, senior.

I had not supposed that we should ever be allowed to know him, for Bloch junior had spoken ill of me to Saint-Loup and of Saint-Loup to me. In particular, he had said to Robert that I was (always) a frightful snob. "Yes, really, he is overjoyed at knowing M. LLLLegrandin." This trick of isolating a word, was, in Bloch, a sign at once of irony and of learning. Saint-Loup, who had never heard the name of Legrandin, was bewildered. "But who is he?" "Oh, he's a bit of all right, he is!" Bloch laughed, thrusting his hands into his pockets as though for warmth, convinced that he was at that moment engaged in contemplation of the picturesque aspect of an extraordinary country gentleman compared to whom those of Barbey d'Aurevilly were as nothing. He consoled himself for his inability to portray M. Legrandin by giving him a string of capital L's, smacking his lips over the name as over a wine from the farthest bin. But these subjective enjoyments remained hidden from other people. If he spoke ill of me to Saint-Loup he made up for it by speaking no less ill of Saint-Loup to me. We had each of us learned these slanders in detail, the next day, not that we repeated them to each other, a thing which would have seemed to us very wrong, but to Bloch appeared so natural and almost inevitable that in his natural anxiety, in the certainty moreover that he would be telling us only what each of us was bound sooner or later to know, he preferred to anticipate the disclosure and, taking Saint-Loup aside, admitted that he had spoken ill of him, on purpose, so that it might be repeated to him, swore to him "by Zeus Kronion, binder of oaths" that he loved him dearly, that he would lay down his life for him; and wiped away a tear. The same day, he contrived to see me alone, made his confession, declared that he had acted in my interest, because he felt that a certain kind of social intercourse was fatal to me and that I was 'worthy of better things.' Then, clasping me by the hand, with the sentimentality of a drunkard, albeit his drunkenness was purely nervous: "Believe me," he said, "and may the black Ker seize me this instant and bear me across the portals of Hades, hateful to men, if yesterday, when I thought of you, of Combray, of my boundless affection for you, of afternoon hours in class which you do not even remember, I did not lie awake weeping all night long. Yes, all night long, I swear it, and alas, I know—for I know the human soul—you will not believe me." I did indeed 'not believe' him, and to his words which, I felt, he was making up on the spur of the moment, and expanding as he went on, his swearing 'by Ker' added no great weight, the Hellenic cult being in Bloch purely literary. Besides, whenever he began to grow sentimental and wished his hearer to grow sentimental over a falsehood, he would say: "I swear it," more for the hysterical satisfaction of lying than to make people think that he was speaking the truth. I did not believe what he was saying, but I bore him no ill-will for that, for I had inherited from my mother and grandmother their incapacity for resentment even of far worse offenders, and their habit of never condemning anyone.

Besides, he was not altogether a bad youth, this Bloch; he could be, and was at times quite charming. And now that the race of Combray, the race from which sprang creatures absolutely unspoiled like my grandmother and mother, seems almost extinct, as I have hardly any choice now save between honest brutes—insensible and loyal, in whom the mere sound of their voices shews at once that they take absolutely no interest in one's life—and another kind of men who so long as they are with one understand one, cherish one, grow sentimental even to tears, take their revenge a few hours later by making some cruel joke at one's expense, but return to one, always just as comprehending, as charming, as closely assimilated, for the moment, to oneself, I think that it is of this latter sort that I prefer if not the moral worth at any rate the society.

"You cannot imagine my grief when I think of you," Bloch went on. "When you come to think of it, it is a rather Jewish side of my nature," he added ironically, contracting his pupils as though he had to prepare for the microscope an infinitesimal quantity of 'Jewish blood,' and as might (but never would) have said a great French noble who among his ancestors, all Christian, might nevertheless have included Samuel Bernard, or further still, the Blessed Virgin from whom, it is said, the Lévy family claim descent, "coming out. I rather like," he continued, "to find room among my feelings for the share (not that it is more than a very tiny share) which may be ascribed to my Jewish origin." He made this statement because it seemed to him at once clever and courageous to speak the truth about his race, a truth which at the same time he managed to water down to a remarkable extent, like misers who decide to pay their debts but have not the courage to pay more than half. This kind of deceit which consists in having the boldness to proclaim the truth, but only after mixing with it an ample measure of lies which falsify it, is commoner than people think, and even among those who do not habitually practise it certain crises in life, especially those in which love is at stake, give them an opportunity of taking to it.

All these confidential diatribes by Bloch to Saint-Loup against me and to me against Saint-Loup ended in an invitation to dinner. I am by no means sure that he did not first make an attempt to secure Saint-Loup by himself. It would have been so like Bloch to do so that probably he did; but if so success did not crown his effort, for it was to myself and Saint-Loup that Bloch said one day: "Dear master, and you, O horseman beloved of Ares, de Saint-Loup-en-Bray, tamer of horses, since I have encountered you by the shore of Amphitrite, resounding with foam, hard by the tents of the swift-shipped Méniers, will both of you come to dinner any day this week with my illustrious sire, of blameless heart?" He proffered this invitation because he desired to attach himself more closely to Saint-Loup who would, he hoped, secure him the right of entry into aristocratic circles. Formed by me for myself, this ambition would have seemed to Bloch the mark of the most hideous snobbishness, quite in keeping with the opinion that he already held of a whole side of my nature which he did not regard —or at least had not hitherto regarded—as its most important side; but the same ambition in himself seemed to him the proof of a finely developed curiosity in a mind anxious to carry out certain social explorations from which he might perhaps glean some literary benefit. M. Bloch senior, when his son had told him that he was going to bring one of his friends in to dinner, and had in a sarcastic but satisfied tone enunciated the name and title of that friend: "The Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray," had been thrown into great commotion. "The Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray! I'll be jiggered!" he had exclaimed, using the oath which was with him the strongest indication of social deference. And he cast at a son capable of having formed such an acquaintance an admiring glance which seemed to say: "Really, it is astounding. Can this prodigy be indeed a child of mine?" which gave my friend as much pleasure as if his monthly allowance had been increased by fifty francs. For Bloch was not in his element at home and felt that his father treated him like a lost sheep because of his lifelong admiration for Leconte de Lisle, Heredia and other 'Bohemians.' But to have got to know Saint-Loup-en-Bray, whose father had been chairman of the Suez Canal board ('I'll be jiggered!') was an indisputable 'score.' What a pity, indeed, that they had left in Paris, for fear of its being broken on the journey, the stereoscope. Alone among men, M. Bloch senior had the art, or at least the right to exhibit it. He did this, moreover, on rare occasions only, and then to good purpose, on evenings when there was a full-dress affair, with hired waiters. So that from these exhibitions of the stereoscope there emanated, for those who were present, as it were a special distinction, a privileged position, and for the master of the house who gave them a reputation such as talent confers on a man—which could not have been greater had the photographs been taken by M. Bloch himself and the machine his own invention. "You weren't invited to Solomon's yesterday?" one of the family would ask another. "No! I was not one of the elect. What was on?" "Oh, a great how-d'ye-do, the stereoscope, the whole box of tricks!" "Indeed! If they had the stereoscope I'm sorry I wasn't there; they say Solomon is quite amazing when he works it."—"It can't be helped;" said M. Bloch now to his son, "it's a mistake to let him have everything at once; that would leave him nothing to look forward to." He had actually thought, in his paternal affection and in the hope of touching his son's heart, of sending for the instrument. But there was not time, or rather they had thought there would not be; for we were obliged to put off the dinner because Saint-Loup could not leave the hotel, where he was waiting for an uncle who was coming to spend a few days with Mme. de Villeparisis. Since—for he was greatly addicted to physical culture, and especially to long walks—it was largely on foot, spending the night in wayside farms, that this uncle was to make the journey from the country house in which he was staying, the precise date of his arrival at Balbec was by no means certain. And Saint-Loup, afraid to stir out of doors, even entrusted me with the duty of taking to Incauville, where the nearest telegraph-office was, the messages that he sent every day to his mistress. The uncle for whom we were waiting was called Palamède, a name that had come down to him from his ancestors, the Princes of Sicily. And later on when I found, as I read history, belonging to this or that Podestà or Prince of the Church, the same Christian name, a fine renaissance medal—some said, a genuine antique—that had always remained in the family, having passed from generation to generation, from the Vatican cabinet to the uncle of my friend, I felt the pleasure that is reserved for those who, unable from lack of means to start a case of medals, or a picture gallery, look out for old names (names of localities, instructive and picturesque as an old map, a bird's-eye view, a sign-board or a return of customs; baptismal names, in which rings out and is plainly heard, in their fine French endings, the defect of speech, the intonation of a racial vulgarity, the vicious pronunciation by which our ancestors made Latin and Saxon words undergo lasting mutilations which in due course became the august law-givers of our grammar books) and, in short, by drawing upon their collections of ancient and sonorous words, give themselves concerts like the people who acquire viols da gamba and viols d'amour so as to perform the music of days gone by upon old-fashioned instruments. Saint-Loup told me that even in the most exclusive aristocratic society his uncle Palamède had the further distinction of being particularly difficult to approach, contemptuous, double-dyed in his nobility, forming with his brother's wife and a few other chosen spirits what was known as the Phoenix Club. There even his insolence was so much dreaded that it had happened more than once that people of good position who had been anxious to meet him and had applied to his own brother for an introduction had met with a refusal: "Really, you mustn't ask me to introduce you to my brother Palamède. My wife and I, we would all of us do our best for you, but it would be no good. Besides, there's always the danger of his being rude to you, and I shouldn't like that." At the Jockey Club he had, with a few of his friends, marked a list of two hundred members whom they would never allow to be introduced to them. And in the Comte de Paris's circle he was known by the nickname of 'The Prince' because of his distinction and his pride.

Saint-Loup told me about his uncle's early life, now a long time ago. Every day he used to take women to a bachelor establishment which he shared with two of his friends, as good-looking as himself, on account of which they were known as 'The Three Graces.'

"One day, a man who just now is very much in the eye, as Balzac would say, of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, but who at a rather awkward period of his early life displayed odd tastes, asked my uncle to let him come to this place. But no sooner had he arrived than it was not to the ladies but to my uncle Palamède that he began to make overtures. My uncle pretended not to understand, made an excuse to send for his two friends; they appeared on the scene, seized the offender, stripped him, thrashed him till he bled, and then with twenty degrees of frost outside kicked him into the street where he was found more dead than alive; so much so that the police started an inquiry which the poor devil had the greatest difficulty in getting them to abandon. My uncle would never go in for such drastic methods now, in fact you can't conceive the number of men of humble position that he, who is so haughty with people in society, has shewn his affection, taken under his wing, even if he is paid for it with ingratitude. It may be a servant who has looked after him in a hotel, for whom he will find a place in Paris, or a farm-labourer whom he will pay to have taught a trade. That is really the rather nice side of his character, in contrast to his social side." Saint-Loup indeed belonged to that type of young men of fashion, situated at an altitude at which it has been possible to cultivate such expressions as: "What is really rather nice about him," "His rather nice side," precious seeds which produce very rapidly a way of looking at things in which one counts oneself as nothing and the 'people' as everything; the exact opposite, in a word, of plebeian pride. "It seems, it is quite impossible to imagine how he set the tone, how he laid down the law for the whole of society when he was a young man. He acted entirely for himself; in any circumstances he did what seemed pleasing to himself, what was most convenient, but at once the snobs would start copying him. If he felt thirsty at the play, and sent out from his box for a drink, the little sitting-rooms behind all the boxes would be filled, a week later, with refreshments. One wet summer, when he had a touch of rheumatism, he ordered an ulster of a loose but warm vicuna wool, which is used only for travelling rugs, and kept the blue and orange stripes shewing. The big tailors at once received orders from all their customers for blue and orange ulsters of rough wool. If he had some reason for wishing to keep every trace of ceremony out of a dinner in a country house where he was spending the day, and to point the distinction had come without evening clothes and sat down to table in the suit he had been wearing that afternoon, it became the fashion, when you were dining in the country, not to dress. If he was eating some special sweet and instead of taking his spoon used a knife, or a special implement of his own invention which he had had made for him by a silversmith, or his fingers, it at once became wrong to eat it in any other way. He wanted once to hear some Beethoven quartets again (for with all his preposterous ideas he is no fool, mind, he has great gifts) and arranged for some musicians to come and play them to him and a few friends once a week. The ultra-fashionable thing that season was to give quite small parties, with chamber music. I should say he's not done at all badly out of life. With his looks, he must have had any number of women! I can't tell you exactly whom, for he is very discreet. But I do know that he was thoroughly unfaithful to my poor aunt. Not that that prevented his being always perfectly charming to her, and her adoring him; he was in mourning for her for years. When he is in Paris, he still goes to the cemetery nearly every day."

The morning after Robert had told me all these things about his uncle, while he waited for him (and waited, as it happened, in vain), as I was coming by myself past the Casino on my way back to the hotel, I had the sensation of being watched by somebody who was not far off. I turned my head and saw a man of about forty, very tall and rather stout, with a very dark moustache, who, nervously slapping the leg of his trousers with a switch, kept fastened upon me a pair of eyes dilated with observation. Every now and then those eyes were shot through by a look of intense activity such as the sight of a person whom they do not know excites only in men to whom, for whatever reason, it suggests thoughts that would not occur to anyone else—madmen, for instance, or spies. He trained upon me a supreme stare at once bold, prudent, rapid and profound, like a last shot which one fires at an enemy at the moment when one turns to flee, and, after first looking all round him, suddenly adopting an absent and lofty air, by an abrupt revolution of his whole body turned to examine a playbill on the wall in the reading of which he became absorbed, while he hummed a tune and fingered the moss-rose in his buttonhole. He drew from his pocket a note-book in which he appeared to be taking down the title of the performance that was announced, looked two or three times at his watch, pulled down over his eyes a black straw hat the brim of which he extended with his hand held out over it like a visor, as though to see whether some one were at last coming, made the perfunctory gesture of annoyance by which people mean to shew that they have waited long enough, although they never make it when they are really waiting, then pushing back his hat and exposing a scalp cropped close except at the sides where he allowed a pair of waved 'pigeon's-wings' to grow quite long, he emitted the loud panting breath that people give who are not feeling too hot but would like it to be thought that they were. He gave me the impression of a 'hotel crook' who had been watching my grandmother and myself for some days, and while he was planning to rob us had just discovered that I had surprised him in the act of spying; to put me off the scent, perhaps he was seeking only, by his new attitude, to express boredom and detachment, but it was with an exaggeration so aggressive that his object appeared to be—at least as much as the dissipating of the suspicions that I must have had of him—to avenge a humiliation which quite unconsciously I must have inflicted on him, to give me the idea not so much that he had not seen me as that I was an object of too little importance to attract his attention. He threw back his shoulders with an air of bravado, bit his lips, pushed up his moustache, and in the lens of his eyes made an adjustment of something that was indifferent, harsh, almost insulting. So effectively that the singularity of his expression made me take him at one moment for a thief and at another for a lunatic. And yet his scrupulously ordered attire was far more sober and far more simple than that of any of the summer visitors I saw at Balbec, and gave a reassurance to my own suit, so often humiliated by the dazzling and commonplace whiteness of their holiday garb. But my grandmother was coming towards me, we took a turn together, and I was waiting for her, an hour later, outside the hotel into which she had gone for a moment, when I saw emerge from it Mme. de Villeparisis with Robert de Saint-Loup and the stranger who had stared at me so intently outside the Casino. Swift as a lightning-flash his look shot through me, just as at the moment when I first noticed him, and returned, as though he had not seen me, to hover, slightly lowered, before his eyes, dulled, like the neutral look which feigns to see nothing without and is incapable of reporting anything to the mind within, the look which expresses merely the satisfaction of feeling round it the eyelids which it cleaves apart with its sanctimonious roundness, the devout, the steeped look that we see on the faces of certain hypocrites, the smug look on those of certain fools. I saw that he had changed his clothes. The suit he was wearing was darker even than the other; and no doubt this was because the true distinction in dress lies nearer to simplicity than the false; but there was something more; when one came near him one felt that if colour was almost entirely absent from these garments it was not because he who had banished it from them was indifferent to it but rather because for some reason he forbade himself the enjoyment of it. And the sobriety which they displayed seemed to be of the kind that comes from obedience to a rule of diet rather than from want of appetite. A dark green thread harmonised, in the stuff of his trousers, with the clock on his socks, with a refinement which betrayed the vivacity of a taste that was everywhere else conquered, to which this single concession had been made out of tolerance for such a weakness, while a spot of red on his necktie was imperceptible, like a liberty which one dares not take.

"How are you? Let me introduce my nephew, the Baron de Guermantes," Mme. de Villeparisis greeted me, while the stranger without looking at me, muttering a vague "Charmed!" which he followed with a "H'm, h'm, h'm" to give his affability an air of having been forced, and doubling back his little finger, forefinger and thumb, held out to me his middle and ring fingers, the latter bare of any ring, which I clasped through his suede glove; then, without lifting his eyes to my face, he turned towards Mme. de Villeparisis.

"Good gracious; I shall be forgetting my own name next!" she exclaimed. "Here am I calling you Baron de Guermantes. Let me introduce the Baron de Charlus. After all, it's not a very serious mistake," she went on, "for you're a thorough Guermantes whatever else you are."

By this time my grandmother had reappeared, and we all set out together. Saint-Loup's uncle declined to honour me not only with a word, with so much as a look, even, in my direction. If he stared strangers out of countenance (and during this short excursion he two or three times hurled his terrible and searching scrutiny like a sounding lead at insignificant people of obviously humble extraction who happened to pass), to make up for that he never for a moment, if I was to judge by myself, looked at the people whom he did know, just as a detective on special duty might except his personal friends from his professional vigilance. Leaving them—my grandmother, Mme. de Villeparisis and him—to talk to one another, I fell behind with Saint-Loup.

"Tell me, am I right in thinking I heard Mme. de Villeparisis say just now to your uncle that he was a Guermantes?"

"Of course he is; Palamède de Guermantes."

"Not the same Guermantes who have a place near Combray, and claim descent from Geneviève de Brabant?"

"Most certainly: my uncle, who is the very last word in heraldry and all that sort of thing, would tell you that our 'cry,' our war-cry, that is to say, which was changed afterwards to 'Passavant' was originally 'Combraysis,'" he said, smiling so as not to appear to be priding himself on this prerogative of a 'cry,' which only the semi-royal houses, the great chiefs of feudal bands enjoyed. "It's his brother who has the place now."

And so she was indeed related, and quite closely, to the Guermantes, this Mme. de Villeparisis who had so long been for me the lady who had given me a duck filled with chocolates, when I was little, more remote then from the Guermantes way than if she had been shut up somewhere on the Méséglise, less brilliant, less highly placed by me than was the Combray optician, and who now suddenly went through one of those fantastic rises in value, parallel to the depreciations, no less unforeseen, of other objects in our possession, which—rise and fall alike—introduce in our youth and in those periods of our life in which a trace of youth persists changes as numerous as the Metamorphoses of Ovid.

"Haven't they got, down there, the busts of all the old lords of Guermantes?"

"Yes; and a lovely sight they are!" Saint-Loup was ironical. "Between you and me, I look on all that sort of thing as rather a joke. But they have got at Guermantes, what is a little more interesting, and that is quite a touching portrait of my aunt by Carrière. It's as fine as Whistler or Velasquez," went on Saint-Loup, who in his neophyte zeal was not always very exact about degrees of greatness. "There are also some moving pictures by Gustave Moreau. My aunt is the niece of your friend Mme. de Villeparisis; she was brought up by her, and married her cousin, who was a nephew, too, of my aunt Villeparisis, the present Duc de Guermantes."

"Then who is this uncle?"

"He bears the title of Baron de Charlus. Properly speaking, when my great-uncle died, my uncle Palamède ought to have taken the title of Prince des Laumes, which his brother used before he became Duc de Guermantes, for in that family they change their names as you'd change your shirt. But my uncle has peculiar ideas about all that sort of thing. And as he feels that people are rather apt to overdo the Italian Prince and Grandee of Spain business nowadays, though he had half-a-dozen titles of 'Prince' to choose from, he has remained Baron de Charlus, as a protest, and with an apparent simplicity which really covers a good deal of pride. 'In these days,' he says, 'everybody is Prince something-or-other; one really must have a title that will distinguish one; I shall call myself Prince when I wish to travel incognito.' According to him there is no older title than the Charlus barony; to prove to you that it is earlier than the Montmorency title, though they used to claim, quite wrongly, to be the premier barons of France when they were only premier in the Ile de France, where their fief was, my uncle will explain to you for hours on end and enjoy doing it, because, although he's a most intelligent man, really gifted, he regards that sort of thing as quite a live topic of conversation," Saint-Loup smiled again. "But as I am not like him, you mustn't ask me to talk pedigrees; I know nothing more deadly, more perishing; really, life is not long enough."

I now recognised in the hard look which had made me turn round that morning outside the Casino the same that I had seen fixed on me at Tansonville, at the moment when Mme. Swann called Gilberte away.

"But, I say, all those mistresses that, you told me, your uncle M. de Charlus had had, wasn't Mme. Swann one of them?"

"Good lord, no! That is to say, my uncle's a great friend of Swann, and has always stood up for him. But no one has ever suggested that he was his wife's lover. You would make a great sensation in Paris society if people thought you believed that."

I dared not reply that it would have caused an even greater sensation in Combray society if people had thought that I did not believe it.

My grandmother was delighted with M. de Charlus. No doubt he attached an extreme importance to all questions of birth and social position, and my grandmother had remarked this, but without any trace of that severity which as a rule embodies a secret envy and the annoyance of seeing some one else enjoy an advantage which one would like but cannot oneself possess. As on the other hand my grandmother, content with her lot and never for a moment regretting that she did not move in a more brilliant sphere, employed only her intellect in observing the eccentricities of M. de Charlus, she spoke of Saint-Loup's uncle with that detached, smiling, almost affectionate kindness with which we reward the object of our disinterested study for the pleasure that it has given us, all the more that this time the object was a person with regard to whom she found that his if not legitimate, at any rate picturesque pretensions shewed him in vivid contrast to the people whom she generally had occasion to see. But it was especially in consideration of his intelligence and sensibility, qualities which it was easy to see that M. de Charlus, unlike so many of the people in society whom Saint-Loup derided, possessed in a marked degree, that my grandmother had so readily forgiven him his aristocratic prejudice. And yet this had not been sacrificed by the uncle, as it was by the nephew, to higher qualities. Rather, M. de Charlus had reconciled it with them. Possessing, by virtue of his descent from the Ducs de Nemours and Princes de Lamballe, documents, furniture, tapestries, portraits painted for his ancestors by Raphael, Velasquez, Boucher, justified in saying that he was visiting a museum and a matchless library when he was merely turning over his family relics at home, he placed in the rank from which his nephew had degraded it the whole heritage of the aristocracy. Perhaps also, being less metaphysical than Saint-Loup, less satisfied with words, more of a realist in his study of men, he did not care to neglect a factor that was essential to his prestige in their eyes and, if it gave certain disinterested pleasures to his imagination, could often be a powerfully effective aid to his utilitarian activities. No agreement can ever be reached between men of his sort and those who obey the ideal within them which urges them to strip themselves bare of such advantages so that they may seek only to realise that ideal, similar in that respect to the painters, the writers who renounce their virtuosity, the artistic peoples who modernise themselves, warrior peoples who take the initiative in a move for universal disarmament, absolute governments which turn democratic and repeal their harsh laws, though as often as not the sequel fails to reward their noble effort; for the men lose their talent, the nations their secular predominance; 'pacificism' often multiplies wars and indulgence criminality. If Saint-Loup's efforts towards sincerity and emancipation were only to be commended as most noble, to judge by their visible result, one could still be thankful that they had failed to bear fruit in M. de Charlus, who had transferred to his own home much of the admirable panelling from the

Guermantes house, instead of substituting, like his nephew, a 'modern style' of decoration, employing Lebourg or Guillaumin. It was none the less true that M. de Charlus's ideal was highly artificial, and, if the epithet can be applied to the word ideal, as much social as artistic. In certain women of great beauty and rare culture whose ancestresses, two centuries earlier, had shared in all the glory and grace of the old order, he found a distinction which made him take pleasure only in their society, and no doubt the admiration for them which he had protested was sincere, but countless reminiscences, historical and artistic, called forth by their names, entered into and formed a great part of it, just as suggestions of classical antiquity are one of the reasons for the pleasure which a booklover finds in reading an Ode of Horace that is perhaps inferior to poems of our own day which would leave the same booklover cold. Any of these women by the side of a pretty commoner was for him what are, hanging beside a contemporary canvas representing a procession or a wedding, those old pictures the history of which we know, from the Pope or King who ordered them, through the hands of people whose acquisition of them, by gift, purchase, conquest or inheritance, recalls to us some event or at least some alliance of historic interest, and consequently some knowledge that we ourselves have acquired, gives it a fresh utility, increases our sense of the richness of the possessions of our memory or of our erudition. M. de Charlus might be thankful that a prejudice similar to his own, by preventing these several great ladies from mixing with women whose blood was less pure, presented them for his veneration unspoiled, in their unaltered nobility, like an eighteenth-century house-front supported on its flat columns of pink marble, in which the passage of time has wrought no change.

M. de Charlus praised the true 'nobility' of mind and heart which characterised these women, playing upon the word in a double sense by which he himself was taken in, and in which lay the falsehood of this bastard conception, of this medley of aristocracy, generosity and art, but also its seductiveness, dangerous to people like my grandmother, to whom the less refined but more innocent prejudice of a nobleman who cared only about quarterings and took no thought for anything besides would have appeared too silly for words, whereas she was defenceless as soon as a thing presented itself under the externals of a mental superiority, so much so, indeed, that she regarded Princes as enviable above all other men because they were able to have a Labruyère, a Fénelon as their tutors. Outside the Grand Hotel the three Guermantes left us; they were going to luncheon with the Princesse de Luxembourg. While my grandmother was saying good-bye to Mme. de Villeparisis and Saint-Loup to my grandmother, M. de Charlus who, so far, had not uttered a word to me, drew back a little way from the group and, when he reached my side, said: "I shall be taking tea this evening after dinner in my aunt Villeparisis's room; I hope that you will give me the pleasure of seeing you there, and your grandmother." With which he rejoined the Marquise.

Although it was Sunday there were no more carriages waiting outside the hotel now than at the beginning of the season. The solicitor's wife, in particular, had decided that it was not worth the expense of hiring one every time simply because she was not going to the Cambremers', and contented herself with staying in her room.

"Is Mme. Blandais not well?" her husband was asked. "We haven't seen her all day."

"She has a slight headache; it's the heat, there's thunder coming. The least thing upsets her; but I expect you will see her this evening; I've told her she ought to come down. It can't do her any harm."

I had supposed that in thus inviting us to take tea with his aunt, whom I never doubted that he would have warned that we were coming, M. de Charlus wished to make amends for the impoliteness which he had shewn me during our walk that morning. But when, on our entering Mme. de Villeparisis's room, I attempted to greet her nephew, even although I walked right round him, while in shrill accents he was telling a somewhat spiteful story about one of his relatives, I did not succeed in catching his eye; I decided to say "Good evening" to him, and fairly loud, to warn him of my presence; but I realised that he had observed it, for before ever a word had passed my lips, just as I began to bow to him, I saw his two fingers stretched out for me to shake without his having turned to look at me or paused in his story. He had evidently seen me, without letting it appear that he had, and I noticed then that his eyes, which were never fixed on the person to whom he was speaking, strayed perpetually in all directions, like those of certain animals when they are frightened, or those of street hawkers who, while they are bawling their patter and displaying their illicit merchandise, keep a sharp look-out, though without turning their heads, on the different points of the horizon from any of which may appear, suddenly, the police. At the same time I was a little surprised to find that Mme. de Villeparisis, while glad to see us, did not seem to have been expecting us, and I was still more surprised to hear M. de Charlus say to my grandmother: "Ah! that was a capital idea of yours to come and pay us a visit; charming of them, is it not, my dear aunt?" No doubt he had noticed his aunt's surprise at our entry and thought, as a man accustomed to set the tone, to strike the right note, that it would be enough to transform that surprise into joy were he to shew that he himself felt it, that it was indeed the feeling which our arrival there ought to have prompted. In which he calculated wisely; for Mme. de Villeparisis, who had a high opinion of her nephew and knew how difficult it was to please him, appeared suddenly to have found new attractions in my grandmother and continued to make much of her. But I failed to understand how M. de Charlus could, in the space of a few hours, have forgotten the invitation—so curt but apparently so intentional, so premeditated—which he had addressed to me that same morning, or why he called a 'capital idea' on my grandmother's part an idea that had been entirely his own. With a scruple of accuracy which I retained until I had reached the age at which I realised that it is not by asking him questions that one learns the truth of what another man has had in his mind, and that the risk of a misunderstanding which will probably pass unobserved is less than that which may come from a purblind insistence: "But, sir," I reminded him, "you remember, surely, that it was you who asked me if we would come in this evening?" Not a sound, not a movement betrayed that M. de Charlus had so much as heard my question. Seeing which I repeated it, like a diplomat, or like young men after a misunderstanding who endeavour, with untiring and unrewarded zeal, to obtain an explanation which their adversary is determined not to give them. Still M. de Charlus answered me not a word. I seemed to see hovering upon his lips the smile of those who from a great height pass judgment on the characters and breeding of their inferiors.

Since he refused to give any explanation, I tried to provide one for myself, but succeeded only in hesitating between several, none of which could be the right one. Perhaps he did not remember, or perhaps it was I who had failed to understand what he had said to me that morning. . . . More probably, in his pride, he did not wish to appear to have sought to attract people whom he despised, and preferred to cast upon them the responsibility for their intrusion. But then, if he despised us, why had he been so anxious that we should come, or rather that my grandmother should come, for of the two of us it was to her alone that he spoke that evening, and never once to me. Talking with the utmost animation to her, as also to Mme. de Villeparisis, hiding, so to speak, behind them, as though he were seated at the back of a theatre-box, he contented himself, turning from them every now and then the exploring gaze of his penetrating eyes, with fastening it on my face, with the same gravity, the same air of preoccupation as if my face had been a manuscript difficult to decipher.

No doubt, if he had not had those eyes, the face of M. de Charlus would have been similar to the faces of many good-looking men. And when Saint-Loup, speaking to me of various other Guermantes, on a later occasion, said: "Gad, they've not got that thoroughbred air, of being gentlemen to their finger-tips, that uncle Palamède has!" confirming my suspicion that a thoroughbred air and aristocratic distinction were not anything mysterious and new but consisted in elements which I had recognised without difficulty and without receiving any particular impression from them, I was to feel that another of my illusions had been shattered. But that face, to which a faint layer of powder gave almost the appearance of a face on the stage, in vain might M. de Charlus hermetically seal its expression; his eyes were like two crevices, two loopholes which alone he had failed to stop, and through which, according to where one stood or sat in relation to him, one felt suddenly flash across one the glow of some internal engine which seemed to offer no reassurance even to him who without being altogether master of it must carry it inside him, at an unstable equilibrium and always on the point of explosion; and the circumspect and unceasingly restless expression of those eyes, with all the signs of exhaustion which, extending from them to a pair of dark rings quite low down upon his cheeks, were stamped on his face, however carefully he might compose and regulate it, made one think of some *incognito*, some disguise assumed by a powerful man in danger, or merely by a dangerous —but tragic—person. I should have liked to divine what was this secret which other men did not carry in their breasts and which had already made

M. de Charlus's gaze so enigmatic to me when I had seen him that morning outside the Casino. But with what I now knew of his family I could no longer believe that they were the eyes of a thief, nor, after what I had heard of his conversation, could I say that they were those of a madman. If he was cold with me, while making himself agreeable to my grandmother, that arose perhaps not from a personal antipathy for, generally speaking, just as he was kindly disposed towards women, of whose faults he used to speak without, as a rule, any narrowing of the broadest tolerance, so he shewed with regard to men, and especially young men, a hatred so violent as to suggest that of certain extreme misogynists for women. Two or three 'carpet-knights,' relatives or intimate friends of Saint-Loup who happened to mention their names, M. de Charlus, with an almost ferocious expression, in sharp contrast to his usual coldness, called: "Little cads!" I gathered that the particular fault which he found in the young men of the period was their extreme effeminacy. "They're absolute women," he said with scorn. But what life would not have appeared effeminate beside that which he expected a man to lead, and never found energetic or virile enough? (He himself, when he walked across country, after long hours on the road would plunge his heated body into frozen streams.) He would not even allow a man to wear a single ring. But this profession of virility did not prevent his having also the most delicate sensibilities. When Mme. de Villeparisis asked him to describe to my grandmother some country house in which Mme. de Sévigné had stayed, adding that she could not help feeling that there was something rather 'literary' about that lady's distress at being parted from "that tiresome Mme. de Grignan":

"On the contrary," he retorted, "I can think of nothing more true. Besides, it was a time in which feelings of that sort were thoroughly understood. The inhabitant of Lafontaine's Monomotapa, running to see his friend who had appeared to him in a dream, and had looked sad, the pigeon finding that the greatest of evils is the absence of the other pigeon, seem to you perhaps, my dear aunt, as exaggerated as Mme. de Sévigné's impatience for the moment when she will be alone with her daughter. It is so fine what she says when she leaves her: 'This parting gives a pain to my soul which I feel like an ache in my body. In absence one is liberal with the hours. One anticipates a time for which one is longing.'" My grandmother was in ecstasies at hearing the Letters thus spoken of, exactly as she would have spoken of them herself. She was astonished that a man could understand them so thoroughly. She found in M. de Charlus a delicacy, a sensibility that were quite feminine. We said to each other afterwards, when we were by ourselves and began to discuss him together, that he must have come under the strong influence of a woman, his mother, or in later life his daughter if he had any children. "A mistress, perhaps," I thought to myself, remembering the influence that Saint-Loup's seemed to have had over him, which enabled me to realise the point to which men can be refined by the women with whom they live.

"Once she was with her daughter, she had probably nothing to say to her," put in Mme. de Villeparisis.

"Most certainly she had: if it was only what she calls 'things so slight that nobody else would notice them but you and me.' And anyhow she was with her. And Labruyère tells us that that is everything. 'To be with the people one loves, to speak to them, not to speak to them, it is all the same.' He is right; that is the only form of happiness," added M. de Charlus in a mournful voice, "and that happiness—alas, life is so ill arranged that one very rarely tastes it; Mme. de Sévigné was after all less to be pitied than most of us. She spent a great part of her life with the person whom she loved."

"You forget that it was not 'love' in her case; the person was her daughter."

"But what matters in life is not whom or what one loves," he went on, in a judicial, peremptory, almost a cutting tone; "it is the fact of loving. What Mme. de Sévigné felt for her daughter has a far better claim to rank with the passion that Racine described in *Andromaque* or *Phèdre* than the commonplace relations young Sévigné had with his mistresses. It's the same with a mystic's love for his God. The hard and fast lines with which we circumscribe love arise solely from our complete ignorance of life."

"You think all that of *Andromaque* and *Phèdre*, do you?" Saint-Loup asked his uncle in a faintly contemptuous tone. "There is more truth in a single tragedy of Racine than in all the dramatic works of Monsieur Victor Hugo," replied M. de Charlus. "People really are overwhelming," Saint-Loup murmured in my ear. "Preferring Racine to Victor, you may say what you like, it's epoch-making!" He was genuinely distressed by his uncle's words, but the satisfaction of saying "you may say what you like" and, better still, "epoch-making" consoled him.

In these reflexions upon the sadness of having to live apart from the person whom one loves (which were to lead my grandmother to say to me that Mme. de Villeparisis's nephew understood certain things quite as well as his aunt, but in a different way, and moreover had something about him that set him far above the average clubman) M. de Charlus not only allowed a refinement of feeling to appear such as men rarely shew; his voice itself, like certain contralto voices which have not been properly trained to the right pitch, so that when they sing it sounds like a duet between a young man and a woman, singing alternately, mounted, when he expressed these delicate sentiments, to its higher notes, took on an unexpected sweetness and seemed to be embodying choirs of betrothed maidens, of sisters, who poured out the treasures of their love. But the bevy of young girls, whom M. de Charlus in his horror of every kind of effeminacy would have been so distressed to learn that he gave the impression of sheltering thus within his voice, did not confine themselves to the interpretation, the modulation of scraps of sentiment. Often while M. de Charlus was talking one could hear their laughter, shrill, fresh laughter of school-girls or coquettes quizzing their partners with all the archness of clever tongues and pretty wits.

He told us how a house that had belonged to his family, in which Marie Antoinette had slept, with a park laid out by Lenôtre, was now in the hands of the Israels, the wealthy financiers, who had bought it. "Israel—

at least that is the name these people go by, which seems to me a generic, a racial term rather than a proper name. One cannot tell; possibly people of that sort do not have names, and are designated only by the collective title of the tribe to which they belong. It is of no importance! But fancy, after being a home of the Guermantes, to belong to Israels!!!" His voice rose. "It reminds me of a room in the Château of Blois where the caretaker who was shewing me over said: 'This is where Mary Stuart used to say her prayers; I use it to keep my brooms in.' Naturally I wish to know nothing more of this house that has let itself be dishonoured, any more than of my cousin Clara de Chimay after she left her husband. But I keep a photograph of the house, when it was still unspoiled, just as I keep one of the Princess before her large eyes had learned to gaze on anyone but my cousin. A photograph acquires something of the dignity which it ordinarily lacks when it ceases to be a reproduction of reality and shews us things that no longer exist. I could give you a copy, since you are interested in that style of architecture," he said to my grandmother. At that moment, noticing that the embroidered handkerchief which he had in his pocket was shewing some coloured threads, he thrust it sharply down out of sight with the scandalised air of a prudish but far from innocent lady concealing attractions which, by an excess of scrupulosity, she regards as indecent. "Would you believe," he went on, "that the first thing the creatures did was to destroy Lenôtre's park, which is as bad as slashing a picture by Poussin? For that alone, these Israels ought to be in prison. It is true," he added with a smile, after a moment's silence, "that there are probably plenty of other reasons why they should be there! In any case, you can imagine the effect, with that architecture behind it, of an English garden."

"But the house is in the same style as the Petit Trianon," said Mme. de Villeparisis, "and Marie-Antoinette had an English garden laid out there."

"Which, all the same, ruins Gabriel's front," replied M. de Charlus. "Obviously, it would be an act of vandalism now to destroy the Hameau. But whatever may be the spirit of the age, I doubt, all the same, whether, in that respect, a whim of Mme. Israel has the same importance as the memory of the Queen."

Meanwhile my grandmother had been making signs to me to go up to bed, in spite of the urgent appeals of Saint-Loup who, to my utter confusion, had alluded in front of M. de Charlus to the depression that used often to come upon me at night before I went to sleep, which his uncle must regard as betokening a sad want of virility. I lingered a few moments still, then went upstairs, and was greatly surprised when, a little later, having heard a knock at my bedroom door and asked who was there, I heard the voice of M. de Charlus saying dryly:

"It is Charlus. May I come in, sir? Sir," he began again in the same tone as soon as he had shut the door, "my nephew was saying just now that you were apt to be worried at night before going to sleep, and also that you were an admirer of Bergotte's books. As I had one here in my luggage which you probably do not know, I have brought it to help you to while away these moments in which you are not comfortable."

I thanked M. de Charlus with some warmth and told him that, on the contrary, I had been afraid that what Saint-Loup had said to him about my discomfort when night came would have made me appear in his eyes more stupid even than I was.

"No; why?" he answered, in a gentler voice. "You have not, perhaps, any personal merit; so few of us have! But for a time at least you have youth, and that is always a charm. Besides, sir, the greatest folly of all is to laugh at or to condemn in others what one does not happen oneself to feel. I love the night, and you tell me that you are afraid of it. I love the scent of roses, and I have a friend whom it throws into a fever. Do you suppose that I think, for that reason, that he is inferior to me? I try to understand everything and I take care to condemn nothing. After all, you must not be too sorry for yourself; I do not say that these moods of depression are not painful, I know that one can be made to suffer by things which the world would not understand. But at least you have placed your affection wisely, in your grandmother. You see a great deal of her. And besides, that is a legitimate affection, I mean one that is repaid. There are so many of which one cannot say that."

He began walking up and down the room, looking at one thing, taking up another. I had the impression that he had something to tell me, and could not find the right words to express it.

"I have another volume of Bergotte here; I will fetch it for you," he went on, and rang the bell. Presently a page came. "Go and find me your head waiter. He is the only person here who is capable of obeying an order intelligently," said M. de Charlus stiffly. "Monsieur Aimé, sir?" asked the page. "I cannot tell you his name; yes, I remember now, I did hear him called Aimé. Run along, I am in a hurry." "He won't be a minute, sir, I saw him downstairs just now," said the page, anxious to appear efficient. There was an interval of silence. The page returned. "Sir, M. Aimé has gone to bed. But I can take your message." "No, you have only to get him out of bed." "But I can't do that, sir; he doesn't sleep here." "Then you can leave us alone." "But, sir," I said when the page had gone, "you are too kind; one volume of Bergotte will be quite enough." "That is just what I was thinking." M. de Charlus walked up and down the room. Several minutes passed in this way, then after a prolonged hesitation, and several false starts, he swung sharply round and, his voice once more stinging, flung at me: "Good night, sir!" and left the room. After all the lofty sentiments which I had heard him express that evening, next day, which was the day of his departure, on the beach, before noon, when I was on my way down to bathe, and M. de Charlus had come across to tell me that my grandmother was waiting for me to join her as soon as I left the water, I was greatly surprised to hear him say, pinching my neck as he spoke, with a familiarity and a laugh that were frankly vulgar:

"But he doesn't give a damn for his old grandmother, does he, eh? Little rascal!"

"What, sir! I adore her!"

"Sir," he said, stepping back a pace, and with a glacial air, "you are still young; you should profit by your youth to learn two things; first, to refrain from expressing sentiments that are too natural not to be taken for granted; and secondly not to dash into speech to reply to things that are said to you before you have penetrated their meaning. If you had taken this precaution a moment ago you would have saved yourself the appearance of speaking at cross-purposes like a deaf man, thereby adding a second absurdity to that of having anchors embroidered on your bathing-dress. I have lent you a book by Bergotte which I require. See that it is brought to me within the next hour by that head waiter with the silly and inappropriate name, who, I suppose, is not in bed at this time of day. You make me see that I was premature in speaking to you last night of the charms of youth; I should have done you a better service had I pointed out to you its thoughtlessness, its inconsequence, and its want of comprehension. I hope, sir, that this little douche will be no less salutary to you than your bathe. But don't let me keep you standing: you may catch cold. Good day, sir."

No doubt he was sorry afterwards for this speech, for some time later I received—in a morocco binding on the front of which was inlaid a panel of tooled leather representing in demi-relief a spray of forget-me-nots—the book which he had lent me, and I had sent back to him, not by Aimé who was apparently 'off duty,' but by the lift-boy.

M. de Charlus having gone, Robert and I were free at last to dine with Bloch. And I realised during this little party that the stories too readily admitted by our friend as funny were favourite stories of M. Bloch senior, and that the son's 'really remarkable person' was always one of his father's friends whom he had so classified. There are a certain number of people whom we admire in our boyhood, a father with better brains than the rest of the family, a teacher who acquires credit in our eyes from the philosophy he reveals to us, a schoolfellow more advanced than we are (which was what Bloch had been to me), who despises the Musset of the *Espoir en Dieu* when we still admire it, and when we have reached Leconte or Claudel will be in ecstasies only over:

A Saint-Blaise, à la Zuecca
Vous étiez, vous étiez bien aise:

with which he will include:

Padoue est un fort bel endroit
Où de très grands docteurs en droit. . . .
Mais j'aime mieux la polenta. . . .
Passe dans mon domino noir
La Toppatelle

and of all the *Nuits* will remember only:

Au Havre, devant l'Atlantique
A Venise, à l'affreux Lido.
Où vient sur l'herbe d'un tombeau
Mourir la pâle Adriatique.

So, whenever we confidently admire anyone, we collect from him, we quote with admiration sayings vastly inferior to the sort which, left to our own judgment, we would sternly reject, just as the writer of a novel puts into it, on the pretext that they are true, things which people have actually said, which in the living context are like a dead weight, form the dull part of the work. Saint-Simon's portraits composed by himself (and very likely without his admiring them himself) are admirable, whereas what he cites as the charming wit of his clever friends is frankly dull where it has not become meaningless. He would have scorned to invent what he reports as so pointed or so coloured when said by Mme. Cornuel or Louis XIV, a point which is to be remarked also in many other writers, and is capable of various interpretations, of which it is enough to note but one for the present: namely, that in the state of mind in which we 'observe' we are a long way below the level to which we rise when we create.

There was, then, embedded in my friend Bloch a father Bloch who lagged forty years behind his son, told impossible stories and laughed as loudly at them from the heart of my friend as did the separate, visible and authentic father Bloch, since to the laugh which the latter emitted, not without several times repeating the last word so that his public might taste the full flavour of the story, was added the braying laugh with which the son never failed, at table, to greet his father's anecdotes. Thus it came about that after saying the most intelligent things young Bloch, to indicate the portion that he had inherited from his family, would tell us for the thirtieth time some of the gems which father Bloch brought out only (with his swallow-tail coat) on the solemn occasions on which young Bloch brought someone to the house on whom it was worth while making an impression; one of his masters, a 'chum' who had taken all the prizes, or, this evening, Saint-Loup and myself. For instance: "A military critic of great insight, who had brilliantly worked out, supporting them with proofs, the reasons for which, in the Russo-Japanese war, the Japanese must inevitably be beaten and the Russians victorious," or else: "He is an eminent gentleman who passes for a great financier in political circles and for a great politician among financiers." These stories were interchangeable with one about Baron de Rothschild and one about Sir Rufus Israels, who were brought into the conversation in an equivocal manner which might let it be supposed that M. Bloch knew them personally.

I was myself taken in, and from the way in which M. Bloch spoke of Bergotte I assumed that he too was an old friend. But with him as with all famous people, M. Bloch knew them only 'without actually knowing them,' from having seen them at a distance in the theatre or in the street. He imagined, moreover, that his appearance, his name, his personality were not unknown to them, and that when they caught sight of him they had often to repress a stealthy inclination to bow. People in society, because they know men of talent, original characters, and have them to dine in their houses, do not on that account understand them any better. But when one has lived to some extent in society, the silliness of its inhabitants makes one too anxious to live, suppose too high a standard of intelligence in the obscure circles in which people know only 'without actually knowing.' I was to discover this when I introduced the topic of Bergotte. M. Bloch was not the only one who was a social success at home. My friend was even more so with his sisters, whom he continually questioned in a hectoring tone, burying his face in his plate, all of which made them laugh until they cried. They had adopted their brother's language, and spoke it fluently, as if it had been obligatory and the only form of speech that people of intelligence might use. When we arrived, the eldest sister said to one of the younger ones: "Go, tell our sage father and our venerable mother!" "Puppies," said Bloch, "I present to you the cavalier Saint-Loup, hurler of javelins, who is come for a few days from Doncières to the dwellings of polished stone, fruitful in horses." And, since he was as vulgar as he was literary, his speech ended as a rule in some pleasantry of a less Homeric kind: "See, draw closer your pepla with fair clasps, what is all that that I see? Does your mother know you're out?" And the Misses Bloch subsided in a tempest of laughter. I told their brother how much pleasure he had given me by recommending me to read Bergotte, whose books I had loved.

M. Bloch senior, who knew Bergotte only by sight, and Bergotte's life only from what was common gossip, had a manner quite as indirect of making the acquaintance of his books, by the help of criticisms that were apparently literary. He lived in the world of 'very nearlies,' where people salute the empty air and arrive at wrong judgments. Inexactitude, incompetence do not modify their assurance; quite the contrary. It is the propitious miracle of self-esteem that, since few of us are in a position to enjoy the society of distinguished people, or to form intellectual friendships, those to whom they are denied still believe themselves to be the best endowed of men, because the optics of our social perspective make every grade of society seem the best to him who occupies it, and beholds as less favoured than himself, less fortunate and therefore to be pitied, the greater men whom he names and calumniates without knowing, judges and despises without understanding them. Even in cases where the multiplication of his modest personal advantages by his self-esteem would not suffice to assure a man the dose of happiness, superior to that accorded to others, which is essential to him, envy is always there to make up the balance. It is true that if envy finds expression in scornful phrases, we must translate 'I have no wish to know him' by 'I have no means of knowing him.' That is the intellectual sense. But the emotional sense is indeed, 'I have no wish to know him.' The speaker knows that it is not true, but he does not, all the same, say it simply to deceive; he says it because it is what he feels, and that is sufficient to bridge the gulf between them, that is to say to make him happy.

Self-centredness thus enabling every human being to see the universe spread out in a descending scale beneath himself who is its lord, M. Bloch afforded himself the luxury of being pitiless when in the morning, as he drank his chocolate, seeing Bergotte's signature at the foot of an article in the newspaper which he had scarcely opened, he disdainfully granted the writer an audience soon cut short, pronounced sentence upon him, and gave himself the comforting pleasure of repeating after every mouthful of the scalding brew: "That fellow Bergotte has become unreadable. My word, what a bore the creature can be. I really must stop my subscription. How involved it all is, bread and butter nonsense!" And he helped himself to another slice.

This illusory importance of M. Bloch senior did, moreover, extend some little way beyond the radius of his own perceptions. In the first place his children regarded him as a superior person. Children have always a tendency either to depreciate or to exalt their parents, and to a good son his father is always the best of fathers, quite apart from any objective reason there may be for admiring him. Now, such reasons were not altogether lacking in the case of M. Bloch, who was an educated man, shrewd, affectionate towards his family. In his most intimate circle they were all the more proud of him because, if, in 'society,' people are judged by a standard (which is incidentally absurd) and according to false but fixed rules, by comparison with the aggregate of all the other fashionable people, in the subdivisions of middle-class life, on the other hand, the dinners, the family parties all turn upon certain people who are pronounced good company, amusing, and who in 'society' would not survive a second evening. Moreover in such an environment where the artificial values of the aristocracy do not exist, their place is taken by distinctions even more stupid. Thus it was that in his family circle, and even among the remotest branches of the tree, an alleged similarity in his way of wearing his moustache and in the bridge of his nose led to M. Bloch's being called "the Duc d'Aumale's double." (In the world of club pages, the one who wears his cap on one side and his jacket tightly buttoned, so as to give himself the appearance, he imagines, of a foreign officer, is he not also a personage of a sort to his comrades?)

The resemblance was the faintest, but you would have said that it conferred a title. When he was mentioned, it would always be: "Bloch? Which one? The Duc d'Aumale?" as people say "Princesse Murat? Which one? The Queen (of Naples)?" And there were certain other minute marks which combined to give him, in the eyes of the cousinhood, an acknowledged claim to distinction. Not going the length of having a carriage of his own, M. Bloch used on special occasions to hire an open victoria with a pair of horses from the Company, and would drive through the Bois de Boulogne, his body sprawling limply from side to side, two fingers pressed to his brow, other two supporting his chin, and if people who did not know him concluded that he was an 'old nuisance,' they were all convinced, in the family, that for smartness Uncle Solomon could have taught Gramont-Caderousse a thing or two. He was one of those people who when they die, because for years they have shared a table in a restaurant on the boulevard with its news-editor, are described as "well known Paris figures" in the social column of the *Radical*. M. Bloch told Saint-Loup and me that Bergotte knew so well why he, M. Bloch, always cut him that as soon as he caught sight of him, at the theatre or in the club, he avoided his eye. Saint-Loup blushed, for it had occurred to him that this club could not be the Jockey, of which his father had been chairman. On the other hand it must be a fairly exclusive club, for M. Bloch had said that Bergotte would never have got into it if he had come up now. So it was not without the fear that he might be 'underrating his adversary' that Saint-Loup asked whether the club in question were the Rue Royale, which was considered 'lowering' by his own family, and to which he knew that certain Israelites had been admitted. "No," replied M. Bloch in a tone at once careless, proud and ashamed, "it is a small club, but far more pleasant than a big one, the Ganaches. We're very strict there, don't you know." "Isn't Sir Rufus Israels the chairman?" Bloch junior asked his father, so as to give him the opportunity for a glorious lie, never suspecting that the financier had not the same eminence in Saint-Loup's eyes as in his. The fact of the matter was that the Ganaches club boasted not Sir Rufus Israels but one of his staff. But as this man was on the best of terms with his employer, he had at his disposal a stock of the financier's cards, and would give one to M. Bloch whenever he wished to travel on a line of which Sir Rufus was a director, the result of which was that old Bloch would say: "I'm just going round to the Club to ask Sir Rufus for a line to the Company." And the card enabled him to dazzle the guards on the trains. The Misses Bloch were more interested in Bergotte and, reverting to him rather than pursue the subject of the Ganaches, the youngest asked her brother, in the most serious tone imaginable, for she believed that there existed in the world, for the designation of men of talent, no other terms than those which he was in the habit of using: "Is he really an amazing good egg, this Bergotte? Is he in the category of the great lads, good eggs like Villiers and Catullus?" "I've met him several times at dress rehearsals," said M. Nissim Bernard. "He is an uncouth creature, a sort of Schlemihl." There was nothing very serious in this allusion to Chamisso's story but the epithet 'Schlemihl' formed part of that dialect, half-German, half-Jewish, the use of which delighted M. Bloch in the family circle, but struck him as vulgar and out of place before strangers. And so he cast a reproving glance at his uncle. "He has talent," said Bloch. "Ah!" His sister sighed gravely, as though to imply that in that case there was some excuse for me. "All writers have talent," said M. Bloch scornfully. "In fact it appears," went on his son, raising his fork, and screwing up his eyes with an air of impish irony, "that he is going to put up for the Academy." "Go on. He hasn't enough to shew them," replied his father, who seemed not to have for the Academy the same contempt as his son and daughters. "He's not big enough." "Besides, the Academy is a salon, and Bergotte has no polish," declared the uncle (whose heiress Mme. Bloch was), a mild and inoffensive person whose surname, Bernard, might perhaps by itself have quickened my grandfather's powers of diagnosis, but would have appeared too little in harmony with a face which looked as if it had been brought back from Darius's palace and restored by Mme. Dieulafoy, had not (chosen by some collector desirous of giving a crowning touch of orientalism to this figure from Susa) his first name, Nissim, stretched out above it the pinions of an androcephalous bull from Khorsabad. But M. Bloch never stopped insulting his uncle, whether it was that he was excited by the unresisting good-humour of his butt, or that the rent of the villa being paid by M. Nissim Bernard, the beneficiary wished to shew that he kept his independence, and, more important still, that he was not seeking by flattery to make sure of the rich inheritance to come. What most hurt the old man was being treated so rudely in front of the manservant. He murmured an unintelligible sentence of which all that could be made out was: "when the meschores are in the room." 'Meschores,' in the Bible, means 'the servant of God.' In the family circle the Blochs used the word when they referred to their own servants, and were always exhilarated by it, because their certainty of not being understood either by Christians or by the servants themselves enhanced in M. Nissim Bernard and M. Bloch their twofold distinction of being 'masters' and at the same time 'Jews.' But this latter source of satisfaction became a source of displeasure when there was 'company.' At such times M. Bloch, hearing his uncle say 'meschores,' felt that he was making his oriental side too prominent, just as a light-of-love who has invited some of her sisters to meet her respectable friends is annoyed if they allude to their profession or use words that do not sound quite nice. Therefore, so far from his uncle's request's producing any effect on M. Bloch, he, beside himself with rage, could contain himself no longer. He let no opportunity pass of scarifying his wretched uncle. "Of course, when there is a chance of saying anything stupid, one can be quite certain that you won't miss it. You would be the first to lick his boots if he were in the room!" shouted M. Bloch, while M. Nissim Bernard in sorrow lowered over his plate the ringleted beard of King Sargon. My friend, when he began to grow his beard, which also was blue-black and crimped, became very like his great-uncle.

"What! Are you the son of the Marquis de Marsantes? Why, I knew him very well," said M. Nissim Bernard to Saint-Loup. I supposed that he meant the word 'knew' in the sense in which Bloch's father had said that he knew Bergotte, namely by sight. But he went on: "Your father was one of my best friends." Meanwhile Bloch had turned very red, his father was looking intensely cross, the Misses Bloch were choking with suppressed laughter. The fact was that in M. Nissim Bernard the love of ostentation which in M. Bloch and his children was held in cheek, had engendered the habit of perpetual lying. For instance, if he was staying in an hotel, M. Nissim Bernard, as M. Bloch equally might have done, would have his newspapers brought to him always by his valet in the dining-room, in the middle of luncheon, when everybody was there, so that they should see that he travelled with a valet. But to the people with whom he made friends in the hotel the uncle used to say what the nephew would never have said, that he was a Senator. He might know quite well that they would sooner or later discover that the title was usurped; he could not, at the critical moment, resist the temptation to assume it. M. Bloch suffered acutely from his uncle's lies and from all the embarrassments that they led to. "Don't pay any attention to him, he talks a great deal of nonsense," he whispered to Saint-Loup, whose interest was all the more whetted, for he was curious to explore the psychology of liars. "A greater liar even than the Ithacan Odysseus, albeit Athene called him the greatest liar among mortals," his son completed the indictment. "Well, upon my word!" cried M. Nissim Bernard, "If I'd only known that I was going to sit down to dinner with my old friend's son! Why, I have a photograph still of your father at home, in Paris, and any number of letters from him. He used always to call me 'uncle,' nobody ever knew why. He was a charming man, sparkling. I remember so well a dinner I gave at Nice; there were Sardou, Labiche, Augier," "Molière, Racine, Corneille," M. Bloch added with sarcasm, while his son completed the tale of guests with "Plautus, Menander, Kalidasa." M. Nissim Bernard, cut to the quick, stopped short in his reminiscence, and, ascetically depriving himself of a great pleasure, remained silent until the end of dinner.

"Saint-Loup with helm of bronze," said Bloch, "have a piece more of this duck with thighs heavy with fat, over which the illustrious sacrificer of birds has spilled numerous libations of red wine."

As a rule, after bringing out from his store for the entertainment of a distinguished guest his anecdotes of Sir Rufus Israels and others, M. Bloch, feeling that he had succeeded in touching and melting his son's heart, would withdraw, so as not to spoil his effect in the eyes of the 'big pot.' If, however, there was an absolutely compelling reason, as for instance on the night when his son won his fellowship, M. Bloch would add to the usual string of anecdotes the following ironical reflexion which he ordinarily reserved for his own personal friends, so that young Bloch was extremely proud to see it produced for his: "The Government have acted unpardonably. They have forgotten to consult M. Coquelin! M. Coquelin has let it be known that he is displeased." (M. Bloch prided himself on being a reactionary, with a contempt for theatrical people.)

But the Misses Bloch and their brother reddened to the tips of their ears, so much impressed were they when Bloch senior, to shew that he could be regal to the last in his entertainment of his son's two 'chums,' gave the order for champagne to be served, and announced casually that, as a treat for us, he had taken three stalls for the performance which a company from the Opéra-Comique was giving that evening at the Casino. He was sorry that he had not been able to get a box. They had all been taken. However, he had often been in the boxes, and really one saw and heard better down by the orchestra. All very well, only, if the defect of his son, that is to say the defect which his son believed to be invisible to other people, was coarseness, the father's was avarice. And so it was in a decanter that we were served with, under the name of champagne, a light sparkling wine, while under that of orchestra stalls he had taken three in the pit, which cost half as much, miraculously persuaded by the divine intervention of his defect that neither at table nor in the theatre (where the boxes were all empty) would the defect be noticed. When M. Bloch had let us moisten our lips in the flat glasses which his son dignified with the style and title of 'craters with deeply hollowed flanks,' he made us admire a picture to which he was so much attached that he had brought it with him to Balbec. He told us that it was a Rubens. Saint-Loup asked innocently if it was signed. M. Bloch replied, blushing, that he had had the signature cut off to make it fit the frame, but that it made no difference, as he had no intention of selling the picture. Then he hurriedly bade us good-night, in order to bury himself in the *Journal Officiel*, back numbers of which littered the house, and which, he informed us, he was obliged to read carefully on account of his 'parliamentary position' as to the precise nature of which, however, he gave us no enlightenment. "I shall take a muffler," said Bloch, "for Zephyrus and Boreas are disputing to which of them shall belong the fish-teeming sea, and should we but tarry a little after the show is over, we shall not be home before the first flush of Eos, the rosy-fingered. By the way," he asked Saint-Loup when we were outside, and I trembled, for I realised at once that it was of M. de Charlus that Bloch was speaking in that tone of irony, "who was that excellent old card dressed in black that I saw you walking with, the day before yesterday, on the beach?" "That was my uncle." Saint-Loup was ruffled. Unfortunately, a 'floater' was far from seeming to Bloch a thing to be avoided. He shook with laughter. "Heartiest congratulations; I ought to have guessed; he has an excellent style, the most priceless dial of an old 'gaga' of the highest lineage." "You are absolutely mistaken; he is an extremely clever man," retorted Saint-Loup, now furious. "I am sorry about that; it makes him less complete. All the same, I should like very much to know him, for I flatter myself I could write some highly adequate pieces about old buffers like that. Just to see him go by, he's killing. But I should leave out of account the caricaturable side, which really is hardly worthy of an artist enamoured of the plastic beauty of phrases, of his mug, which (you'll forgive me) doubled me up for a moment with joyous laughter, and I should bring into prominence the aristocratic side of your uncle, who after all has a distinct bovine effect, and when one has finished laughing does impress one by his great air of style. But," he went on, addressing myself this time, "there is also a matter of a very different order about which I have been meaning to question you, and every time we are together, some god, blessed denizen of Olympus, makes me completely forget to ask for a piece of information which might before now have been and is sure some day to be of the greatest use to me. Tell me, who was the lovely lady I saw you with in the Jardin d'Acclimatation accompanied by a gentleman whom I seem to know by sight and a little girl with long hair?" It had been quite plain to me at the time that Mme. Swann did not remember Bloch's name, since she had spoken of him by another, and had described my friend as being on the staff of some Ministry, as to which I had never since then thought of finding out whether he had joined it. But how came it that Bloch, who, according to what she then told me, had got himself introduced to her, was ignorant of her name? I was so much surprised that I stopped for a moment before answering. "Whoever she is," he went on, "hearty congratulations; you can't have been bored with her. I picked her up a few days before that on the Zone railway, where, speaking of zones, she was so kind as to undo hers for the benefit of your humble servant; I have never had such a time in my life, and we were just going to make arrangements to meet again when somebody she knew had the bad taste to get in at the last station but one." My continued silence did not appear to please Bloch. "I was hoping," he said, "thanks to you, to learn her address, so as to go there several times a week to taste in her arms the delights of Eros, dear to the gods; but I do not insist since you seem pledged to discretion with respect to a professional who gave herself to me three times running, and in the most refined manner, between Paris and the Point-du-Jour. I am bound to see her again, some night."

I called upon Bloch after this dinner; he returned my call, but I was out and he was seen asking for me by Françoise, who, as it happened, albeit he had visited us at Combray, had never set eyes on him until then. So that she knew only that one of 'the gentlemen' who were friends of mine had looked in to see me, she did not know 'with what object,' dressed in a nondescript way, which had not made any particular impression upon her. Now though I knew quite well that certain of Françoise's social ideas must for ever remain impenetrable by me, ideas based, perhaps, partly upon confusions between words, between names which she had once and for all time mistaken for one another, I could not restrain myself, who had long since abandoned the quest for enlightenment in such cases, from seeking—and seeking, moreover, in vain—to discover what could be the immense significance that the name of Bloch had for Françoise. For no sooner had I mentioned to her that the young man whom she had seen was M. Bloch than she recoiled several paces, so great were her stupor and disappointment. "What! Is that M. Bloch?" she cried, thunderstruck, as if so portentous a personage ought to have been endowed with an appearance which 'made you know' as soon as you saw him that you were in the presence of one of the great ones of the earth; and, like some one who has discovered that an historical character is not 'up to' the level of his reputation, she repeated in an impressed tone, in which I could detect latent, for future growth, the seeds of a universal scepticism: "What! Is that M. Bloch? Well, really, you would never think it, to look at him." She seemed also to bear me a grudge, as if I had always 'overdone' the praise of Bloch to her. At the same time she was kind enough to add: "Well, he may be M. Bloch, and all that. I'm sure Master can say he's every bit as good."

She had presently, with respect to Saint-Loup, whom she worshipped, a disillusionment of a different kind and of less severity: she discovered that he was a Republican. Now for all that, when speaking, for instance, of the Queen of Portugal, she would say with that disrespect which is, among the people, the supreme form of respect: "Amélie, Philippe's sister," Françoise was a Royalist. But when it came to a Marquis; a Marquis who had dazzled her at first sight, and who was for the Republic, seemed no longer real. And she shewed the same ill-humour as if I had given her a box which she had believed to be made of gold, and had thanked me for it effusively, and then a jeweller had revealed to her that it was only plated. She at once withdrew her esteem from Saint-Loup, but soon afterwards restored it to him, having reflected that he could not, being the Marquis de Saint-Loup, be a Republican, that he was just pretending, in his own interest, for with such a Government as we had it might be a great advantage to him. From that moment her coldness towards him, her resentment towards myself ceased. And when she spoke of Saint-Loup she said: "He is a hypocrite," with a broad and friendly smile which made it clear that she 'considered' him again just as much as when she first knew him, and that she had forgiven him.

As a matter of fact, Saint-Loup was absolutely sincere and disinterested, and it was this intense moral purity which, not being able to find entire satisfaction in a selfish sentiment such as love, nor on the other hand meeting in him the impossibility (which existed in me, for instance) of finding its spiritual nourishment elsewhere than in himself, rendered him truly capable (just as I was incapable) of friendship.

Françoise was no less mistaken about Saint-Loup when she complained that he had 'that sort of' air, as if he did not look down upon the people, but that it was all just a pretence, and you had only to see him when he was in a temper with his groom. It had indeed sometimes happened that Robert would scold his groom with a certain amount of brutality, which proved that he had the sense not so much of the difference as of the equality between classes and masses. "But," he said in answer to my rebuke of his having treated the man rather harshly, "why should I go out of my way to speak politely to him? Isn't he my equal? Isn't he just as near to me as any of my uncles and cousins? You seem to think that I ought to treat him with respect, as an inferior. You talk like an aristocrat!" he added scornfully.

And indeed if there was a class to which he shewed himself prejudiced and hostile, it was the aristocracy, so much so that he found it as hard to believe in the superior qualities of a man in society as he found it easy to believe in those of a man of the people. When I mentioned the Princesse de Luxembourg, whom I had met with his aunt:

"An old trout," was his comment. "Like all that lot. She's a sort of cousin of mine, by the way."

Having a strong prejudice against the people who frequented it, he went rarely into 'Society,' and the contemptuous or hostile attitude which he adopted towards it served to increase, among all his near relatives, the painful impression made by his intimacy with a woman on the stage, a connexion which, they declared, would be his ruin, blaming it specially for having bred in him that spirit of denigration, that bad spirit, and for having led him astray, after which it was only a matter of time before he would have dropped out altogether. And so, many easy-going men of the Faubourg Saint-Germain were without compunction when they spoke of Robert's mistress. "Those girls do their job," they would say, "they are as good as anybody else. But that one; no, thank you! We cannot forgive her. She has done too much harm to a fellow we were fond of." Of course, he was not the first to be caught in that snare. But the others amused themselves like men of the world, continued to think like men of the world about politics, about everything. As for him, his family found him 'soured.' They did not bear in mind that, for many young men of fashion who would otherwise remain uncultivated mentally, rough in their friendships, without gentleness or taste—it is very often their mistress who is their real master, and connexions of this sort the only school of morals in which they are initiated into a superior culture, and learn the value of disinterested relations. Even among the lower orders (who, when it comes to coarseness, so often remind us of the world of fashion) the woman, more sensitive, finer, more leisured, is driven by curiosity to adopt certain refinements, respects certain beauties of sentiment and of art which, though she may fail to understand them, she nevertheless places above what has seemed most desirable to the man, above money or position. Now whether the mistress be a young blood's (such as Saint-Loup) or a young workman's (electricians, for instance, must now be included in our truest order of Chivalry) her lover has too much admiration and respect for her not to extend them also to what she herself respects and admires; and for him the scale of values is thereby reversed. Her sex alone makes her weak; she suffers from nervous troubles, inexplicable things which in a man, or even in another woman—a woman whose nephew or cousin he was—would bring a smile to the lips of this stalwart young man. But he cannot bear to see her suffer whom he loves. The young nobleman who, like Saint-Loup, has a mistress acquires the habit, when he takes her out to dine, of carrying in his pocket the valerian 'drops' which she may need, of ordering the waiter, firmly and with no hint of sarcasm, to see that he shuts the doors quietly and not to put any damp moss on the table, so as to spare his companion those discomforts which himself he has never felt, which compose for him an occult world in whose reality she has taught him to believe, discomforts for which he now feels pity without in the least needing to understand them, for which he will still feel pity when other women than she shall be the sufferers. Saint-Loup's mistress—as the first monks of the middle ages taught Christendom—had taught him to be kind to animals, for which she had a passion, never moving without her dog, her canaries, her love-birds; Saint-Loup looked after them with motherly devotion and treated as brutes the people who were not good to dumb creatures. On the other hand, an actress, or so-called actress, like this one who was living with him,—whether she were intelligent or not, and as to that I had no knowledge—by making him find the society of fashionable women boring, and look upon having to go out to a party as a painful duty, had saved him from snobbishness and cured him of frivolity. If, thanks to her, his social engagements filled a smaller place in the life of her young lover, at the same time, whereas if he had been simply a drawing-room man, vanity or self-interest would have dictated his choice of friends as rudeness would have characterised his treatment of them, his mistress had taught him to bring nobility and refinement into his friendship. With her feminine instinct, with a keener appreciation in men of certain qualities of sensibility which her lover might perhaps, without her guidance, have misunderstood and laughed at, she had always been swift to distinguish from among the rest of Saint-Loup's friends, the one who had a real affection for him, and to make that one her favourite. She knew how to make him feel grateful to such a friend, shew his gratitude, notice what things gave his friend pleasure and what pain. And presently Saint-Loup, without any more need of her to prompt him, began to think of all these things by himself, and at Balbec, where she was not with him, for me whom she had never seen, whom he had perhaps not yet so much as mentioned in his letters to her, of his own accord would pull up the window of a carriage in which I was sitting, take out of the room the flowers that made me feel unwell, and when he had to say good-bye to several people at once manage to do so before it was actually time for him to go, so as to be left alone and last with me, to make that distinction between them and me, to treat me differently from the rest. His mistress had opened his mind to the invisible, had brought a serious element into his life, delicacy into his heart, but all this escaped his sorrowing family who repeated: "That creature will be the death of him; meanwhile she's doing what she can to disgrace him." It is true that he had succeeded in getting out of her all the good that she was capable of doing him; and that she now caused him only incessant suffering, for she had taken an intense dislike to him and tormented him in every possible way. She had begun, one fine day, to look upon him as stupid and absurd because the friends that she had among the younger writers and actors had assured her that he was, and she duly repeated what they had said with that passion, that want of reserve which we shew whenever we receive from without and adopt as our own opinions or customs of which we previously knew nothing. She readily professed, like her actor friends, that between Saint-Loup and herself there was a great gulf fixed, and not to be crossed, because they were of different races, because she was an intellectual and he, whatever he might pretend, the born enemy of the intellect. This view of him seemed to her profound, and she sought confirmation of it in the most insignificant words, the most trivial actions of her lover. But when the same friends had further convinced her that she was destroying, in company so ill-suited to her, the great hopes which she had, they said, aroused in them, that her lover would leave a mark on her, that by living with him she was spoiling her future as an artist; to her contempt for Saint-Loup was added the same hatred that she would have felt for him if he had insisted upon inoculating her with a deadly germ. She saw him as seldom as possible, at the same time postponing the hour of a definite rupture, which seemed to me a highly improbable event. Saint-Loup made such sacrifices for her that unless she was ravishingly beautiful (but he had always refused to shew me her photograph, saying: "For one thing, she's not a beauty, and besides she always takes badly. These are only some snapshots that I took myself with my kodak; they would give you a wrong idea of her.") it would surely be difficult for her to find another man who would consent to anything of the sort. I never reflected that a certain obsession to make a name for oneself, even when one has no talent, that the admiration, no more than the privately expressed admiration of people who are imposing on one, can (although it may not perhaps have been the case with Saint-Loup's mistress) be, even for a little prostitute, motives more determining than the pleasure of making money. Saint-Loup who, without quite understanding what was going on in the mind of his mistress, did not believe her to be completely sincere either in her unfair reproaches or in her promises of undying love, had all the same at certain moments the feeling that she would break with him whenever she could, and accordingly, impelled no doubt by the instinct of self-preservation which was part of his love, a love more clear-sighted, possibly, than Saint-Loup himself, making use, too, of a practical capacity for business which was compatible in him with the loftiest and blindest flights of the heart, had refused to settle upon her any capital, had borrowed an enormous sum so that she should want nothing, but made it over to her only from day to day. And no doubt, assuming that she really thought of leaving him, she was calmly waiting until she had feathered her nest, a process which, with the money given her by Saint-Loup, would not perhaps take very long, but would all the same require a time which must be conceded to prolong the happiness of my new friend—or his misery.

This dramatic period of their connexion, which had now reached its most acute stage, the most cruel for Saint-Loup, for she had forbidden him to remain in Paris, where his presence exasperated her, and had forced him to spend his leave at Balbec, within easy reach of his regiment—had begun one evening at the house of one of Saint-Loup's aunts, on whom he had prevailed to allow his friend to come there, before a large party, to recite some of the speeches from a symbolical play in which she had once appeared in an 'advanced' theatre, and for which she had made him share the admiration that she herself professed.

But when she appeared in the room, with a large lily in her hand, and wearing a costume copied from the *Ancilla Domini*, which she had persuaded Saint-Loup was an absolute 'vision of beauty,' her entrance had been greeted, in that assemblage of clubmen and duchesses, with smiles which the monotonous tone of her chantings, the oddity of certain words and their frequent recurrence had changed into fits of laughter, stifled at first but presently so uncontrollable that the wretched reciter had been unable to go on. Next day Saint-Loup's aunt had been universally censured for having allowed so grotesque an actress to appear in her drawing-room. A well-known duke made no bones about telling her that she had only herself to blame if she found herself criticised. "Damn it all, people really don't come to see 'turns' like that! If the woman had talent, even; but she has none and never will have any. 'Pon my soul, Paris is not such a fool as people make out. Society does not consist exclusively of imbeciles. This little lady evidently believed that she was going to take Paris by surprise. But Paris is not so easily surprised as all that, and there are still some things that they can't make us swallow."

As for the actress, she left the house with Saint-Loup, exclaiming:

"What do you mean by letting me in for those geese, those uneducated bitches, those dirty corner-boys? I don't mind telling you, there wasn't a man in the room who didn't make eyes at me or squeeze my foot, and it was because I wouldn't look at them that they were out for revenge."

Words which had changed Robert's antipathy for people in society into a horror that was at once deep and distressing, and was provoked in him most of all by those who least deserved it, devoted kinsmen who, on behalf of the family, had sought to persuade Saint-Loup's lady to break with him, a move which she represented to him as inspired by their passion for her. Robert, although he had at once ceased to see them, used to imagine when he was parted from his mistress as he was now, that they or others like them were profiting by his absence to return to the charge and had possibly prevailed over her. And when he spoke of the sensualists who were disloyal to their friends, who sought to seduce their friends' wives, tried to make them come to houses of assignation, his whole face would glow with suffering and hatred.

"I would kill them with less compunction than I would kill a dog, which is at least a well-behaved beast, and loyal and faithful. There are men who deserve the guillotine if you like, far more than poor wretches who have been led into crime by poverty and by the cruelty of the rich."

He spent the greater part of his time in sending letters and telegrams to his mistress. Every time that, while still preventing him from returning to Paris, she found an excuse to quarrel with him by post, I read the news at once in his evident discomposure. Inasmuch as his mistress never told him what fault she found with him, suspecting that possibly if she did not tell him it was because she did not know herself, and simply had had enough of him, he would still have liked an explanation and used to write to her: "Tell me what I have done wrong. I am quite ready to acknowledge my faults," the grief that overpowered him having the effect of persuading him that he had behaved badly.

But she kept him waiting indefinitely for her answers which, when they did come, were meaningless. And so it was almost always with a furrowed brow, and often with empty hands that I would see Saint-Loup returning from the post office, where, alone in all the hotel, he and Françoise went to fetch or to hand in letters, he from a lover's impatience, she with a servant's mistrust of others. (His telegrams obliged him to take a much longer journey.)

When, some days after our dinner with the Blochs, my grandmother told me with a joyful air that Saint-Loup had just been asking her whether, before he left Balbec, she would not like him to take a photograph of her, and when I saw that she had put on her nicest dress on purpose, and was hesitating between several of her best hats, I felt a little annoyed by this childishness, which surprised me coming from her. I even went the length of asking myself whether I had not been mistaken in my grandmother, whether I did not esteem her too highly, whether she was as unconcerned as I had always supposed in the adornment of her person, whether she had not indeed the very weakness that I believed most alien to her temperament, namely coquetry.

Unfortunately, this displeasure that I derived from the prospect of a photographic 'sitting,' and more particularly from the satisfaction with which my grandmother appeared to be looking forward to it, I made so apparent that Françoise remarked it and did her best, unintentionally, to increase it by making me a sentimental, gushing speech, by which I refused to appear moved.

"Oh, Master; my poor Madame will be so pleased at having her likeness taken, she is going to wear the hat that her old Françoise has trimmed for her, you must allow her, Master."

I acquired the conviction that I was not cruel in laughing at Françoise's sensibility, by reminding myself that my mother and grandmother, my models in all things, often did the same. But my grandmother, noticing that I seemed cross, said that if this plan of her sitting for her photograph offended me in any way she would give it up. I would not let her; I assured her that I saw no harm in it, and left her to adorn herself, but, thinking that I shewed my penetration and strength of mind, I added a few stinging words of sarcasm, intended to neutralize the pleasure which she seemed to find in being photographed, so that if I was obliged to see my grandmother's magnificent hat, I succeeded at least in driving from her face that joyful expression which ought to have made me glad; but alas, it too often happens, while the people we love best are still alive, that such expressions appear to us as the exasperating manifestation of some unworthy freak of fancy rather than as the precious form of the happiness which we should dearly like to procure for them. My ill-humour arose more particularly from the fact that, during the last week, my grandmother had appeared to be avoiding me, and I had not been able to have her to myself for a moment, either by night or day. When I came back in the afternoon to be alone with her for a little I was told that she was not in the hotel; or else she would shut herself up with Françoise for endless confabulations which I was not permitted to interrupt. And when, after being out all evening with Saint-Loup, I had been thinking on the way home of the moment at which I should be able to go to my grandmother and to kiss her, in vain might I wait for her to knock on the partition between us the three little taps which would tell me to go in and say good night to her; I heard nothing; at length I would go to bed, a little resentful of her for depriving me, with an indifference so new and strange in her, of a joy on which I had so much counted, I would lie still for a while, my heart throbbing as in my childhood, listening to the wall which remained silent, until I cried myself to sleep.

SEASCAPE, WITH FRIEZE OF GIRLS

THAT day, as for some days past, Saint-Loup had been obliged to go to Doncières, where, until his leave finally expired, he would be on duty now until late every afternoon. I was sorry that he was not at Balbec. I had seen alight from carriages and pass, some into the ball-room of the Casino, others into the ice-cream shop, young women who at a distance had seemed to me lovely. I was passing through one of those periods of our youth, unprovided with any one definite love, vacant, in which at all times and in all places—as a lover the woman by whose charms he is smitten—we desire, we seek, we see Beauty. Let but a single real feature—the little that one distinguishes of a woman seen from afar or from behind—enable us to project the form of beauty before our eyes, we imagine that we have seen her before, our heart beats, we hasten in pursuit, and will always remain half-persuaded that it was she, provided that the woman has vanished: it is only if we manage to overtake her that we realise our mistake.

Besides, as I grew more and more delicate, I was inclined to overrate the simplest pleasures because of the difficulties that sprang up in the way of my attaining them. Charming women I seemed to see all round me, because I was too tired, if it was on the beach, too shy if it was in the Casino or at a pastry-cook's, to go anywhere near them. And yet if I was soon to die I should have liked first to know the appearance at close quarters, in reality of the prettiest girls that life had to offer, even although it should be another than myself or no one at all who was to take advantage of the offer. (I did not, in fact, appreciate the desire for possession that underlay my curiosity.) I should have had the courage to enter the ball-room if Saint-Loup had been with me. Left by myself, I was simply hanging about in front of the Grand Hotel until it was time for me to join my grandmother, when, still almost at the far end of the paved 'front' along which they projected in a discordant spot of colour, I saw coming towards me five or six young girls, as different in appearance and manner from all the people whom one was accustomed to see at Balbec as could have been, landed there none knew whence, a flight of gulls which performed with measured steps upon the sands—the dawdlers using their wings to overtake the rest—a movement the purpose of which seems as obscure to the human bathers, whom they do not appear to see, as it is clearly determined in their own birdish minds.

One of these strangers was pushing as she came, with one hand, her bicycle; two others carried golf-clubs; and their attire generally was in contrast to that of the other girls at Balbec, some of whom, it was true, went in for games, but without adopting any special outfit.

It was the hour at which ladies and gentlemen came out every day for a turn on the 'front,' exposed to the merciless fire of the long glasses fastened upon them, as if they had each borne some disfigurement which she felt it her duty to inspect in its minutest details, by the chief magistrate's wife, proudly seated there with her back to the band-stand, in the middle of that dread line of chairs on which presently they too, actors turned critics, would come and establish themselves, to scrutinise in their turn those others who would then be filing past them. All these people who paced up and down the 'front,' tacking as violently as if it had been the deck of a ship (for they could not lift a leg without at the same time waving their arms, turning their heads and eyes, settling their shoulders, compensating by a balancing movement on one side for the movement they had just made on the other, and puffing out their faces), and who, pretending not to see so as to let it be thought that they were not interested, but covertly watching, for fear of running against the people who were walking beside or coming towards them, did, in fact, butt into them, became entangled with them, because each was mutually the object of the same secret attention veiled beneath the same apparent disdain; their love—and consequently their fear—of the crowd being one of the most powerful motives in all men, whether they seek to please other people or to astonish them, or to shew them that they despise them. In the case of the solitary, his seclusion, even when it is absolute and ends only with life itself, has often as its primary cause a disordered love of the crowd, which so far overrules every other feeling that, not being able to win, when he goes out, the admiration of his hall-porter, of the passers-by, of the cabman whom he hails, he prefers not to be seen by them at all, and with that object abandons every activity that would oblige him to go out of doors.

Among all these people, some of whom were pursuing a train of thought, but if so betrayed its instability by spasmodic gestures, a roving gaze as little in keeping as the circumspect titubation of their neighbours, the girls whom I had noticed, with that mastery over their limbs which comes from perfect bodily condition and a sincere contempt for the rest of humanity, were advancing straight ahead, without hesitation or stiffness, performing exactly the movements that they wished to perform, each of their members in full independence of all the rest, the greater part of their bodies preserving that immobility which is so noticeable in a good waltzer. They were now quite near me. Although each was a type absolutely different from the others, they all had beauty; but to tell the truth I had seen them for so short a time, and without venturing to look them straight in the face, that I had not yet individualised any of them. Save one, whom her straight nose, her dark complexion pointed in contrast among the rest, like (in a renaissance picture of the Epiphany) a king of Arab cast, they were known to me only, one by a pair of eyes, hard, set and mocking; another by cheeks in which the pink had that coppery tint which makes one think of geraniums; and even of these points I had not yet indissolubly attached any one to one of these girls rather than to another; and when (according to the order in which their series met the eye, marvellous because the most different aspects came next one another, because all scales of colours were combined in it, but confused as a piece of music in which I should not have been able to isolate and identify at the moment of their passage the successive phrases, no sooner distinguished than forgotten) I saw emerge a pallid oval, black eyes, green eyes, I knew not if these were the same that had already charmed me a moment ago, I could not bring them home to any one girl whom I might thereby have set apart from the rest and so identified. And this want, in my vision, of the demarcations which I should presently establish between them sent flooding over the group a wave of harmony, the continuous transfusion of a beauty fluid, collective and mobile.

It was not perhaps, in this life of ours, mere chance that had, in forming this group of friends, chosen them all of such beauty; perhaps these girls (whose attitude was enough to reveal their nature, bold, frivolous and hard), extremely sensitive to everything that was ludicrous or ugly, incapable of yielding to an intellectual or moral attraction, had naturally felt themselves, among companions of their own age, repelled by all those in whom a pensive or sensitive disposition was betrayed by shyness, awkwardness, constraint, by what, they would say, 'didn't appeal' to them, and from such had held aloof; while they attached themselves, on the other hand, to others to whom they were drawn by a certain blend of grace, suppleness, and physical neatness, the only form in which they were able to picture the frankness of a seductive character and the promise of pleasant hours in one another's company. Perhaps, too, the class to which they belonged, a class which I should not have found it easy to define, was at that point in its evolution at which, whether thanks to its growing wealth and leisure, or thanks to new athletic habits, extended now even to certain plebeian elements, and a habit of physical culture to which had not yet been added the culture of the mind, a social atmosphere, comparable to that of smooth and prolific schools of sculpture, which have not yet gone in for tortured expressions, produces naturally and in abundance fine bodies with fine legs, fine hips, wholesome and reposeful faces, with an air of agility and guile. And were they not noble and calm models of human beauty that I beheld there, outlined against the sea, like statues exposed to the sunlight upon a Grecian shore?

Just as if, in the heart of their band, which progressed along the 'front' like a luminous comet, they had decided that the surrounding crowd was composed of creatures of another race whose sufferings even could not awaken in them any sense of fellowship, they appeared not to see them, forced those who had stopped to talk to step aside, as though from the path of a machine that had been set going by itself, so that it was no good waiting for it to get out of their way, their utmost sign of consciousness being when, if some old gentleman of whom they did not admit the existence and thrust from them the contact, had fled with a frightened or furious, but a headlong or ludicrous motion, they looked at one another and smiled. They had, for whatever did not form part of their group, no affectation of contempt; their genuine contempt was sufficient. But they could not set eyes on an obstacle without amusing themselves by crossing it, either in a running jump or with both feet together, because they were all filled to the brim, exuberant with that youth which we need so urgently to spend that even when we are unhappy or unwell, obedient rather to the necessities of our age than to the mood of the day, we can never pass anything that can be jumped over or slid down without indulging ourselves conscientiously, interrupting, interspersing our slow progress—as Chopin his most melancholy phrase—with graceful deviations in which caprice is blended with virtuosity. The wife of an elderly banker, after hesitating between various possible exposures for her husband, had settled him on a folding chair, facing the 'front,' sheltered from wind and sun by the band-stand. Having seen him comfortably installed there, she had gone to buy a newspaper which she would read aloud to him, to distract him—one of her little absences which she never prolonged for more than five minutes, which seemed long enough to him but which she repeated at frequent intervals so that this old husband on whom she lavished an attention that she took care to conceal, should have the impression that he was still quite alive and like other people and was in no need of protection. The platform of the band-stand provided, above his head, a natural and tempting springboard, across which, without a moment's hesitation, the eldest of the little band began to run; she jumped over the terrified old man, whose yachting cap was brushed by the nimble feet, to the great delight of the other girls, especially of a pair of green eyes in a 'dashing' face, which expressed, for that bold act, an admiration and a merriment in which I seemed to discern a trace of timidity, a shamefaced and blustering timidity which did not exist in the others. "Oh, the poor old man; he makes me sick; he looks half dead;" said a girl with a croaking voice, but with more sarcasm than sympathy. They walked on a little way, then stopped for a moment in the middle of the road, with no thought whether they were impeding the passage of other people, and held a council, a solid body of irregular shape, compact, unusual and shrill, like birds that gather on the ground at the moment of flight; then they resumed their leisurely stroll along the 'front,' against a background of sea.

By this time their charming features had ceased to be indistinct and impersonal. I had dealt them like cards into so many heaps to compose (failing their names, of which I was still ignorant) the big one who had jumped over the old banker; the little one who stood out against the horizon of sea with her plump and rosy cheeks, her green eyes; the one with the straight nose and dark complexion, in such contrast to all the rest; another, with a white face like an egg on which a tiny nose described an arc of a circle like a chicken's beak; yet another, wearing a hooded cape (which gave her so poverty-stricken an appearance, and so contradicted the smartness of the figure beneath that the explanation which suggested itself was that this girl must have parents of high position who valued their self-esteem so far above the visitors to Balbec and the sartorial elegance of their own children that it was a matter of the utmost indifference to them that their daughter should stroll on the 'front' dressed in a way which humbler people would have considered too modest); a girl with brilliant, laughing eyes and plump, colourless cheeks, a black polo-cap pulled down over her face, who was pushing a bicycle with so exaggerated a movement of her hips, with an air borne out by her language, which was so typically of the gutter and was being shouted so loud, when I passed her (although among her expressions I caught that irritating 'live my own life') that, abandoning the hypothesis which her friend's hooded cape had made me construct, I concluded instead that all these girls belonged to the population which frequents the racing-tracks, and must be the very juvenile mistresses of professional bicyclists. In any event, in none of my suppositions was there any possibility of their being virtuous. At first sight—in the way in which they looked at one another and smiled, in the insistent stare of the one with the dull cheeks—I had grasped that they were not. Besides, my grandmother had always watched over me with a delicacy too timorous for me not to believe that the sum total of the things one ought not to do was indivisible or that girls who were lacking in respect for their elders would suddenly be stopped short by scruples when there were pleasures at stake more tempting than that of jumping over an octogenarian.

Though they were now separately identifiable, still the mutual response which they gave one another with eyes animated by self-sufficiency and the spirit of comradeship, in which were kindled at every moment now the interest now the insolent indifference with which each of them sparkled according as her glance fell on one of her friends or on passing strangers, that consciousness, moreover, of knowing one another intimately enough always to go about together, by making them a 'band apart' established between their independent and separate bodies, as slowly they advanced, a bond invisible but harmonious, like a single warm shadow, a single atmosphere making of them a whole as homogeneous in its parts as it was different from the crowd through which their procession gradually wound.

For an instant, as I passed the dark one with the fat cheeks who was wheeling a bicycle, I caught her smiling, sidelong glance, aimed from the centre of that inhuman world which enclosed the life of this little tribe, an inaccessible, unknown world to which the idea of what I was could certainly never attain nor find a place in it. Wholly occupied with what her companions were saying, this young girl in her polo-cap, pulled down very low over her brow, had she seen me at the moment in which the dark ray emanating from her eyes had fallen on me? In the heart of what universe did she distinguish me? It would have been as hard for me to say as, when certain peculiarities are made visible, thanks to the telescope, in a neighbouring planet, it is difficult to arrive at the conclusion that human beings inhabit it, that they can see us, or to say what ideas the sight of us can have aroused in their minds.

If we thought that the eyes of a girl like that were merely two glittering sequins of mica, we should not be athirst to know her and to unite her life to ours. But we feel that what shines in those reflecting discs is not due solely to their material composition; that it is, unknown to us, the dark shadows of the ideas that the creature is conceiving, relative to the people and places that she knows—the turf of racecourses, the sand of cycling tracks over which, pedalling on past fields and woods, she would have drawn me after her, that little peri, more seductive to me than she of the Persian paradise—the shadows, too, of the home to which she will presently return, of the plans that she is forming or that others have formed for her;

and above all that it is she, with her desires, her sympathies, her revulsions, her obscure and incessant will. I knew that I should never possess this young cyclist if I did not possess also what there was in her eyes. And it was consequently her whole life that filled me with desire; a sorrowful desire because I felt that it was not to be realised, but exhilarating, because what had hitherto been my life, having ceased of a sudden to be my whole life, being no more now than a little part of the space stretching out before me, which I was burning to cover and which was composed of the lives of these girls, offered me that prolongation, that possible multiplication of oneself which is happiness. And no doubt the fact that we had, these girls and I, not one habit—as we had not one idea—in common, was to make it more difficult for me to make friends with them and to please them. But perhaps, also, it was thanks to those differences, to my consciousness that there did not enter into the composition of the nature and actions of these girls a single element that I knew or possessed, that there came in place of my satiety a thirst—like that with which a dry land burns—for a life which my soul, because it had never until now received one drop of it, would absorb all the more greedily in long draughts, with a more perfect imbibition.

I had looked so closely at the dark cyclist with the bright eyes that she seemed to notice my attention, and said to the biggest of the girls something that I could not hear. To be honest, this dark one was not the one that pleased me most, simply because she was dark and because (since the day on which, from the little path by Tansonville, I had seen Gilberte) a girl with reddish hair and a golden skin had remained for me the inaccessible ideal. But Gilberte herself, had I not loved her principally because she had appeared to me haloed with that aureole of being the friend of Bergotte, of going with him to look at old cathedrals? And in the same way could I not rejoice at having seen this dark girl look at me (which made me hope that it would be easier for me to get to know her first), for she would introduce me to the others, to the pitiless one who had jumped over the old man's head, to the cruel one who had said "He makes me sick, poor old man!"—to all of them in turn, among whom, moreover, she had the distinction of being their inseparable companion? And yet the supposition that I might some day be the friend of one or other of these girls, that their eyes, whose incomprehensible gaze struck me now and again, playing upon me unawares, like the play of sunlight upon a wall, might ever, by a miraculous alchemy, allow to interpenetrate among their ineffable particles the idea of my existence, some affection for my person, that I myself might some day take my place among them in the evolution of their course by the sea's edge—that supposition appeared to me to contain within it a contradiction as insoluble as if, standing before some classical frieze or a fresco representing a procession, I had believed it possible for me, the spectator, to take my place, beloved of them, among the godlike hierophants.

The happiness of knowing these girls was, then, not to be realised. Certainly it would not have been the first of its kind that I had renounced. I had only to recall the numberless strangers whom, even at Balbec, the carriage bowling away from them at full speed had forced me for ever to abandon. And indeed the pleasure that was given me by the little band, as noble as if it had been composed of Hellenic virgins, came from some suggestion that there was in it of the flight of passing figures along a road. This fleetingness of persons who are not known to us, who force us to put out from the harbour of life, in which the women whose society we frequent have all, in course of time, laid bare their blemishes, urges us into that state of pursuit in which there is no longer anything to arrest the imagination. But to strip our pleasures of imagination is to reduce them to their own dimensions, that is to say to nothing. Offered me by one of those procuresses (whose good offices, all the same, the reader has seen that I by no means scorned), withdrawn from the element which gave them so many fine shades and such vagueness, these girls would have enchanted me less. We must have imagination, awakened by the uncertainty of being able to attain our object, to create a goal which hides our other goal from us, and by substituting for sensual pleasures the idea of penetrating into a life prevents us from recognising that pleasure, from tasting its true savour, from restricting it to its own range.

There must be, between us and the fish which, if we saw it for the first time cooked and served on a table, would not appear worth the endless trouble, craft and stratagem that are necessary if we are to catch it, interposed, during our afternoons with the rod, the ripple to whose surface come wavering, without our quite knowing what we intend to do with them, the burnished gleam of flesh, the indefiniteness of a form, in the fluidity of a transparent and flowing azure.

These girls benefited also by that alteration of social values characteristic of seaside life. All the advantages which, in our ordinary environment, extend and magnify our importance, we there find to have become invisible, in fact to be eliminated; while on the other hand the people whom we suppose, without reason, to enjoy similar advantages appear to us amplified to artificial dimensions. This made it easy for strange women generally, and to-day for these girls in particular, to acquire an enormous importance in my eyes, and impossible to make them aware of such importance as I might myself possess.

But if there was this to be said for the excursion of the little band, that it was but an excerpt from the innumerable flight of passing women, which had always disturbed me, their flight was here reduced to a movement so slow as to approach immobility. Now, precisely because, in a phase so far from rapid, faces no longer swept past me in a whirlwind, but calm and distinct still appeared beautiful, I was prevented from thinking as I had so often thought when Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage bore me away that, at closer quarters, if I had stopped for a moment, certain details, a pitted skin, drooping nostrils, a silly gape, a grimace of a smile, an ugly figure might have been substituted, in the face and body of the woman, for those that I had doubtless imagined; for there had sufficed a pretty outline, a glimpse of a fresh complexion, for me to add, in entire good faith, a fascinating shoulder, a delicious glance of which I carried in my mind for ever a memory or a preconceived idea, these rapid decipherings of a person whom we see in motion exposing us thus to the same errors as those too rapid readings in which, on a single syllable and without waiting to identify the rest, we base instead of the word that is in the text a wholly different word with which our memory supplies us. It could not be so with me now. I had looked well at them all; each of them I had seen, not from every angle and rarely in full face, but all the same in two or three aspects different enough to enable me to make either the correction or the verification, to take a 'proof' of the different possibilities of line and colour that are hazarded at first sight, and to see persist in them, through a series of expressions, something unalterably material. I could say to myself with conviction that neither in Paris nor at Balbec, in the most favourable hypotheses of what might have happened, even if I had been able to stop and talk to them, the passing women who had caught my eye, had there ever been one whose appearance, followed by her disappearance without my having managed to know her, had left me with more regret than would these, had given me the idea that her friendship might be a thing so intoxicating. Never, among actresses nor among peasants nor among girls from a convent school had I beheld anything so beautiful, impregnated with so much that was unknown, so inestimably precious, so apparently inaccessible. They were, of the unknown and potential happiness of life, an illustration so delicious and in so perfect a state that it was almost for intellectual reasons that I was desperate with the fear that I might not be able to make, in unique conditions which left no room for any possibility of error, proper trial of what is the most mysterious thing that is offered to us by the beauty which we desire and console ourselves for never possessing, by demanding pleasure—as Swann had always refused to do before Odette's day—from women whom we have not desired, so that, indeed, we die without having ever known what that other pleasure was. No doubt it was possible that it was not in reality an unknown pleasure, that on a close inspection its mystery would dissipate and vanish, that it was no more than a projection, a mirage of desire. But in that case I could blame only the compulsion of a law of nature—which if it applied to these girls would apply to all—and not the imperfection of the object. For it was that which I should have chosen above all others, feeling quite certain, with a botanist's satisfaction, that it was not possible to find collected anywhere rarer specimens than these young flowers who were interrupting at this moment before my eyes the line of the sea with their slender hedge, like a bower of Pennsylvania roses adorning a garden on the brink of a cliff, between which is contained the whole tract of ocean crossed by some steamer, so slow in gliding along the blue and horizontal line that stretches from one stem to the next that an idle butterfly, dawdling in the cup of a flower which the moving hull has long since passed, can, if it is to fly and be sure of arriving before the vessel, wait until nothing but the tiniest slice of blue still separates the questing prow from the first petal of the flower towards which it is steering.

I went indoors because I was to dine at Rivebelle with Robert, and my grandmother insisted that on those evenings, before going out, I must lie down for an hour on my bed, a rest which the Balbec doctor presently ordered me to extend to the other evenings also.

However, there was no need, when one went indoors, to leave the 'front' and to enter the hotel by the hall, that is to say from behind. By virtue of an alteration of the clock which reminded me of those Saturdays when, at Combray, we used to have luncheon an hour earlier, now with summer at the full the days had become so long that the sun was still high in the heavens, as though it were only tea-time, when the tables were being laid for dinner in the Grand Hotel. And so the great sliding windows were kept open from the ground. I had but to step across a low wooden sill to find myself in the dining-room, through which I walked and straight across to the lift.

As I passed the office I addressed a smile to the manager, and with no shudder of disgust gathered one for myself from his face which, since I had been at Balbec, my comprehensive study of it was injecting and transforming, little by little, like a natural history preparation. His features had become familiar to me, charged with a meaning that was of no importance but still intelligible, like a script which one can read, and had ceased in any way to resemble these queer, intolerable characters which his face had presented to me on that first day, when I had seen before me a personage now forgotten, or, if I succeeded in recalling him, unrecognisable, difficult to identify with this insignificant and polite personality of which the other was but a caricature, a hideous and rapid sketch. Without either the shyness or the sadness of the evening of my arrival I rang for the attendant, who no longer stood in silence while I rose by his side in the lift as in a mobile thoracic cage propelled upwards along its ascending pillar, but repeated:

"There aren't the people now there were a month back. They're beginning to go now; the days are drawing in." He said this not because there was any truth in it but because, having an engagement, presently, for a warmer part of the coast, he would have liked us all to leave, so that the hotel could be shut up and he have a few days to himself before 'rejoining' in his new place. 'Rejoin' and 'new' were not, by the way, incompatible terms, since, for the lift-boy, 'rejoin' was the usual form of the verb 'to join.' The only thing that surprised me was that he condescended to say 'place,' for he belonged to that modern proletariat which seeks to efface from our language every trace of the rule of domesticity. A moment later, however, he informed me that in the 'situation' which he was about to 'rejoin,' he would have a smarter 'tunic' and a better 'salary,' the words 'livery' and 'wages' sounding to him obsolete and unseemly. And as, by an absurd contradiction, the vocabulary has, through thick and thin, among us 'masters,' survived the conception of inequality, I was always failing to understand what the lift-boy said. For instance, the only thing that interested me was to know whether my grandmother was in the hotel. Now, forestalling my questions, the lift-boy would say to me: "That lady has just gone out from your rooms." I was invariably taken in; I supposed that he meant my grandmother. "No, that lady; I think she's an employee of yours." As in the old speech of the middle classes, which ought really to be done away with, a cook is not called an employee, I thought for a moment: "But he must be mistaken. We don't own a factory; we haven't any employees." Suddenly I remembered that the title of 'employee' is, like the wearing of a moustache among waiters, a sop to their self-esteem given to servants, and realised that this lady who had just gone out must be Françoise (probably on a visit to the coffee-maker, or to watch the Belgian lady's little maid at her sewing), though even this sop did not satisfy the lift-boy, for he would say quite naturally, speaking pityingly of his own class, 'with the working man' or 'the small person,' using the same singular form as Racine when he speaks of 'the poor.' But as a rule, for my zeal and timidity of the first evening were now things of the past, I no longer spoke to the lift-boy. It was he now who stood there and received no answer during the short journey on which he threaded his way through the hotel, hollowed out inside like a toy, which extended round about us, floor by floor, the ramifications of its corridors in the depths of which the light grew velvety, lost its tone, diminished the communicating doors, the steps of the service stairs which it transformed into that amber haze, unsubstantial and mysterious as a twilight, in which Rembrandt picks out here and there a window-sill or a well-head. And on each landing a golden light reflected from the carpet indicated the setting sun and the lavatory window.

I asked myself whether the girls I had just seen lived at Balbec, and who they could be. When our desire is thus concentrated upon a little tribe of humanity which it singles out from the rest, everything that can be associated with that tribe becomes a spring of emotion and then of reflexion. I had heard a lady say on the 'front': "She is a friend of the little Simonet girl" with that self-important air of inside knowledge, as who should say: "He is the inseparable companion of young La Rochefoucauld." And immediately she had detected on the face of the person to whom she gave this information a curiosity to see more of the favoured person who was 'a friend of the little Simonet.' A privilege, obviously, that did not appear to be granted to all the world. For aristocracy is a relative state. And there are plenty of inexpensive little holes and corners where the son of an upholsterer is the arbiter of fashion and reigns over a court like any young Prince of Wales. I have often since then sought to recall how it first sounded for me there on the beach, that name of Simonet, still quite indefinite as to its form, which I had failed to distinguish, and also as to its significance, to the designation by it of such and such a person, or perhaps of some one else; imprinted, in fact, with that vagueness, that novelty which we find so moving in the sequel, when the name whose letters are every moment engraved more deeply on our hearts by our incessant thought of them has become (though this was not to happen to me with the name of the 'little Simonet' until several years had passed) the first coherent sound that comes to our lips, whether on waking from sleep or on recovering from a swoon, even before the idea of what o'clock it is or of where we are, almost before the word 'I,' as though the person whom it names were more 'we' even than we ourselves, and as though after a brief spell of unconsciousness the phase that is the first of all to dissolve is that in which we were not thinking of her. I do not know why I said to myself from the first that the name Simonet must be that of one of the band of girls; from that moment I never ceased to ask myself how I could get to know the Simonet family, get to know them, moreover, through people whom they considered superior to themselves (which ought not to be difficult if the girls were only common little 'bounders') so that they might not form a disdainful idea of me. For one cannot have a perfect knowledge, one cannot effect the complete absorption of a person who disdains one, so long as one has not overcome her disdain. And since, whenever the idea of women who are so different from us penetrates our senses, unless we are able to forget it or the competition of other ideas eliminates it, we know no rest until we have converted those aliens into something that is compatible with ourself, our heart being in this respect endowed with the same kind of reaction and activity as our physical organism, which cannot abide the infusion of any foreign body into its veins without at once striving to digest and assimilate it: the little Simonet must be the prettiest of them all—she who, I felt moreover, might yet become my mistress, for she was the only one who, two or three times half-turning her head, had appeared to take cognisance of my fixed stare. I asked the lift-boy whether he knew of any people at Balbec called Simonet. Not liking to admit that there was anything which he did not know, he replied that he seemed to have heard the name somewhere. As we reached the highest landing I told him to have the latest lists of visitors sent up to me.

I stepped out of the lift, but instead of going to my room I made my way farther along the corridor, for before my arrival the valet in charge of the landing, despite his horror of draughts, had opened the window at the end, which instead of looking out to the sea faced the hill and valley inland, but never allowed them to be seen, for its panes, which were made of clouded glass, were generally closed. I made a short 'station' in front of it, time enough just to pay my devotions to the view which for once it revealed over the hill against which the back of the hotel rested, a view that contained but a solitary house, planted in the middle distance, though the perspective and the evening light in which I saw it, while preserving its mass, gave it a sculptural beauty and a velvet background, as though to one of those architectural works in miniature, tiny temples or chapels wrought in gold and enamels, which serve as reliquaries and are exposed only on rare and solemn days for the veneration of the faithful. But this moment of adoration had already lasted too long, for the valet, who carried in one hand a bunch of keys and with the other saluted me by touching his verger's skull-cap, though without raising it, on account of the pure, cool evening air, came and drew together, like those of a shrine, the two sides of the window, and so shut off the minute edifice, the glistening relic from my adoring gaze. I went into my room. Regularly, as the season advanced, the picture that I found there in my window changed. At first it was broad daylight, and dark only if the weather was bad: and then, in the greenish glass which it distended with the curve of its round waves, the sea, set among the iron uprights of my window like a piece of stained glass in its leads, ravelled out over all the deep rocky border of the bay little plumed triangles of an unmoving spray delineated with the delicacy of a feather or a downy breast from Pisanello's pencil, and fixed in that white, unalterable, creamy enamel which is used to depict fallen snow in Gallé's glass.

Presently the days grew shorter and at the moment when I entered my room the violet sky seemed branded with the stiff, geometrical, travelling, effulgent figure of the sun (like the representation of some miraculous sign, of some mystical apparition) leaning over the sea from the hinge of the horizon as a sacred picture leans over a high altar, while the different parts of the western sky exposed in the glass fronts of the low mahogany bookcases that ran along the walls, which I carried back in my mind to the marvellous painting from which they had been detached, seemed like those different scenes which some old master executed long ago for a confraternity upon a shrine, whose separate panels are now exhibited side by side upon the wall of a museum gallery, so that the visitor's imagination alone can restore them to their place on the predella of the reredos. A few weeks later, when I went upstairs, the sun had already set. Like the one that I used to see at Combray, behind the Calvary, when I was coming home from a walk and looking forward to going down to the kitchen before dinner, a band of red sky over the sea, compact and clear-cut as a layer of aspic over meat, then, a little later, over a sea already cold and blue like a grey mullet, a sky of the same pink as the salmon that we should presently be ordering at Rivebelle reawakened the pleasure which I was to derive from the act of dressing to go out to dinner. Over the sea, quite near the shore, were trying to rise, one beyond another, at wider and wider intervals, vapours of a pitchy blackness but also of the polish and consistency of agate, of a visible weight, so much so that the highest among them, poised at the end of their contorted stem and overreaching the centre of gravity of the pile that had hitherto supported them, seemed on the point of bringing down in ruin this lofty structure already half the height of the sky, and of precipitating it into the sea. The sight of a ship that was moving away like a nocturnal traveller gave me the same impression that I had had in the train of being set free from the necessity of sleep and from confinement in a bedroom. Not that I felt myself a prisoner in the room in which I now was, since in another hour I should have left it and be getting into the carriage. I threw myself down on the bed; and, just as if I had been lying in a berth on board one of those steamers which I could see quite near to me and which, when night came, it would be strange to see stealing slowly out into the darkness, like shadowy and silent but unsleeping swans, I was on all sides surrounded by pictures of the sea.

But as often as not they were, indeed, only pictures; I forgot that below their coloured expanse was hollowed the sad desolation of the beach, travelled by the restless evening breeze whose breath I had so anxiously felt on my arrival at Balbec; besides, even in my room, being wholly taken up with thoughts of the girls whom I had seen go past, I was no longer in a state of mind calm or disinterested enough to allow the formation of any really deep impression of beauty. The anticipation of dinner at Rivebelle made my mood more frivolous still, and my mind, dwelling at such moments upon the surface of the body which I was going to dress up so as to try to appear as pleasing as possible in the feminine eyes which would be scrutinising me in the brilliantly lighted restaurant, was incapable of putting any depth behind the colour of things. And if, beneath my window, the unwearying, gentle flight of sea-martins and swallows had not arisen like a playing fountain, like living fireworks, joining the intervals between their soaring rockets with the motionless white streaming lines of long horizontal wakes of foam, without the charming miracle of this natural and local phenomenon, which brought into touch with reality the scenes that I had before my eyes, I might easily have believed that they were no more than a selection, made afresh every day, of paintings which were shewn quite arbitrarily in the place in which I happened to be and without having any necessary connexion with that place. At one time it was an exhibition of Japanese colour-prints: beside the neat disc of sun, red and round as the moon, a yellow cloud seemed a lake against which black swords were outlined like the trees upon its shore; a bar of a tender pink which I had never seen again after my first paint-box swelled out into a river on either bank of which boats seemed to be waiting high and dry for some one to push them down and set them afloat. And with the contemptuous, bored, frivolous glance of an amateur or a woman hurrying through a picture gallery between two social engagements, I would say to myself: "Curious sunset, this; it's different from what they usually are but after all I've seen them just as fine, just as remarkable as this." I had more pleasure on evenings when a ship, absorbed and liquefied by the horizon so much the same in colour as herself (an Impressionist exhibition this time) that it seemed to be also of the same matter, appeared as if some one had simply cut out with a pair of scissors her bows and the rigging in which she tapered into a slender filigree from the vaporous blue of the sky. Sometimes the ocean filled almost the whole of my window, when it was enlarged and prolonged by a band of sky edged at the top only by a line that was of the same blue as the sea, so that I supposed it all to be still sea, and the change in colour due only to some effect of light and shade. Another day the sea was painted only in the lower part of the window, all the rest of which was so filled with innumerable clouds, packed one against another in horizontal bands, that its panes seemed to be intended, for some special purpose or to illustrate a special talent of the artist, to present a 'Cloud Study,' while the fronts of the various bookcases shewing similar clouds but in another part of the horizon and differently coloured by the light, appeared to be offering as it were the repetition—of which certain of our contemporaries are so fond—of one and the same effect always observed at different hours but able now in the immobility of art to be seen all together in a single room, drawn in pastel and mounted under glass. And sometimes to a sky and sea uniformly grey a rosy touch would be added with an exquisite delicacy, while a little butterfly that had gone to sleep at the foot of the window seemed to be attaching with its wings at the corner of this 'Harmony in Grey and Pink' in the Whistler manner the favourite signature of the Chelsea master. The pink vanished; there was nothing now left to look at. I rose for a moment and before lying down again drew close the inner curtains. Above them I could see from my bed the ray of light that still remained, growing steadily fainter and thinner, but it was without any feeling of sadness, without any regret for its passing that I thus allowed to die above the curtains the hour at which, as a rule, I was seated at table, for I knew that this day was of another kind than ordinary days, longer, like those arctic days which night interrupts for a few minutes only; I knew that from the chrysalis of the dusk was preparing to emerge, by a radiant metamorphosis, the dazzling light of the Rivebelle restaurant. I said to myself: "It is time"; I stretched myself on the bed, and rose, and finished dressing; and I found a charm in these idle moments, lightened of every material burden, in which while down below the others were dining I was employing the forces accumulated during the inactivity of this last hour of the day only in drying my washed body, in putting on a dinner jacket, in tying my tie, in making all those gestures which were already dictated by the anticipated pleasure of seeing again some woman whom I had noticed, last time, at Rivebelle, who had seemed to be watching me, had perhaps left the table for a moment only in the hope that I would follow her; it was with joy that I enriched myself with all these attractions so as to give myself, whole, alert, willing, to a new life, free, without cares, in which I would lean my hesitations upon the calm strength of Saint-Loup, and would choose from among the different species of animated nature and the produce of every land those which, composing the unfamiliar dishes that my companion would at once order, might have tempted my appetite or my imagination. And then at the end of the season came the days when I could no longer pass indoors from the 'front' through the dining-room; its windows stood open no more, for it was night now outside and the swarm of poor folk and curious idlers, attracted by the blaze of light which they might not reach, hung in black clusters chilled by the north wind to the luminous sliding walls of that buzzing hive of glass.

There was a knock at my door; it was Aimé who had come upstairs in person with the latest lists of visitors.

Aimé could not go away without telling me that Dreyfus was guilty a thousand times over. "It will all come out," he assured me, "not this year, but next. It was a gentleman who's very thick with the General Staff, told me. I asked him if they wouldn't decide to bring it all to light at once, before the year is out. He laid down his cigarette," Aimé went on, acting the scene for my benefit, and, shaking his head and his forefinger as his informant had done, as much as to say: "We mustn't expect too much!"—" 'Not this year, Aimé,' those were his very words, putting his hand on my shoulder, 'It isn't possible. But next Easter, yes!' " And Aimé tapped me gently on my shoulder, saying, "You see, I'm letting you have it exactly as he told me," whether because he was flattered at this act of familiarity by a distinguished person or so that I might better appreciate, with a full knowledge of the facts, the worth of the arguments and our grounds for hope.

It was not without a slight throb of the heart that on the first page of the list I caught sight of the words 'Simonet and family.' I had in me a store of old dream-memories which dated from my childhood, and in which all the tenderness (tenderness that existed in my heart, but, when my heart felt it, was not distinguishable from anything else) was wafted to me by a person as different as possible from myself. This person, once again I fashioned her, utilising for the purpose the name Simonet and the memory of the harmony that had reigned between the young bodies which I had seen displaying themselves on the beach, in a sportive procession worthy of Greek art or of Giotto. I knew not which of these girls was Mlle. Simonet, if indeed any of them were so named, but I did know that I was loved by Mlle. Simonet and that I was going, with Saint-Loup's help, to attempt to know her. Unfortunately, having on that condition only obtained an extension of his leave, he was obliged to report for duty every day at Doncières: but to make him forsake his military duty I had felt that I might count, more even than on his friendship for myself, on that same curiosity, as a human naturalist, which I myself had so often felt—even without having seen the person mentioned, and simply on hearing some one say that there was a pretty cashier at a fruiterer's—to acquaint myself with a new variety of feminine beauty. But that curiosity I had been wrong in hoping to excite in Saint-Loup by speaking to him of my band of girls. For it had been and would long remain paralysed in him by his love for that actress whose lover he was. And even if he had felt it lightly stirring him he would have repressed it, from an almost superstitious belief that on his own fidelity might depend that of his mistress. And so it was without any promise from him that he would take an active interest in my girls that we started out to dine at Rivebelle.

At first, when we arrived there, the sun used just to have set, but it was light still; in the garden outside the restaurant, where the lamps had not yet been lighted, the heat of the day fell and settled, as though in a vase along the sides of which the transparent, dusky jelly of the air seemed of such consistency that a tall rose-tree fastened against the dim wall which it streaked with pink veins, looked like the arborescence that one sees at the heart of an onyx. Presently night had always fallen when we left the carriage, often indeed before we started from Balbec if the evening was wet and we had put off sending for the carriage in the hope of the weather's improving. But on those days it was without any sadness that I listened to the wind howling, I knew that it did not mean the abandonment of my plans, imprisonment in my bedroom; I knew that in the great dining-room of the restaurant, which we would enter to the sound of the music of the gypsy band, the innumerable lamps would triumph easily over darkness and chill, by applying to them their broad cauteries of molten gold, and I jumped light-heartedly after Saint-Loup into the closed carriage which stood waiting for us in the rain. For some time past the words of Bergotte, when he pronounced himself positive that, in spite of all I might say, I had been created to enjoy, pre-eminently, the pleasures of the mind, had restored to me, with regard to what I might succeed in achieving later on, a hope that was disappointed afresh every day by the boredom that I felt on setting myself down before a writing-table to start work on a critical essay or a novel. "After all," I said to myself, "possibly the pleasure that its author has found in writing it is not the infallible test of the literary value of a page; it may be only an accessory, one that is often to be found superadded to that value, but the want of which can have no prejudicial effect on it. Perhaps some of the greatest masterpieces were written yawning." My grandmother set my doubts at rest by telling me that I should be able to work and should enjoy working as soon as my health improved. And, our doctor having thought it only prudent to warn me of the grave risks to which my state of health might expose me, and having outlined all the hygienic precaution that I ought to take to avoid any accident—I subordinated all my pleasures to an object which I judged to be infinitely more important than them, that of becoming strong enough to be able to bring into being the work which I had, possibly, within me; I had been exercising over myself, ever since I had come to Balbec, a scrupulous and constant control. Nothing would have induced me, there, to touch the cup of coffee which would have robbed me of the night's sleep that was necessary if I was not to be tired next day. But as soon as we reached Rivebelle, immediately, what with the excitement of a new pleasure, and finding myself in that different zone into which the exception to our rule of life takes us after it has cut the thread, patiently spun throughout so many days, that was guiding us towards wisdom—as though there were never to be any such thing as to-morrow, nor any lofty aims to be realised, vanished all that exact machinery of prudent hygienic measures which had been working to safeguard them. A waiter was offering to take my coat, whereupon Saint-Loup asked: "You're sure you won't be cold? Perhaps you'd better keep it: it's not very warm in here."

"No, no," I assured him; and perhaps I did not feel the cold; but however that might be, I no longer knew the fear of falling ill, the necessity of not dying, the importance of work. I gave up my coat; we entered the dining-room to the sound of some warlike march played by the gipsies, we advanced between two rows of tables laid for dinner as along an easy path of glory, and, feeling a happy glow imparted to our bodies by the rhythms of the orchestra which rendered us its military honours, gave us this unmerited triumph, we concealed it beneath a grave and frozen mien, beneath a languid, casual gait, so as not to be like those music-hall 'mashers' who, having wedded a ribald verse to a patriotic air, come running on to the stage with the martial countenance of a victorious general.

From that moment I was a new man, who was no longer my grandmother's grandson and would remember her only when it was time to get up and go, but the brother, for the time being, of the waiters who were going to bring us our dinner.

The dose of beer—all the more, that of champagne—which at Balbec I should not have ventured to take in a week, albeit to my calm and lucid consciousness the flavour of those beverages represented a pleasure clearly appreciable, since it was also one that could easily be sacrificed, I now imbibed at a sitting, adding to it a few drops of port wine, too much distracted to be able to taste it, and I gave the violinist who had just been playing the two louis which I had been saving up for the last month with a view to buying something, I could not remember what. Several of the waiters, set going among the tables, were flying along at full speed, each carrying on his outstretched palms a dish which it seemed to be the object of this kind of race not to let fall. And in fact the chocolate *soufflés* arrived at their destination unspilled, the potatoes *à l'anglaise,* in spite of the pace which ought to have sent them flying, came arranged as at the start round the Pauilhac lamb. I noticed one of these servants, very tall, plumed with superb black locks, his face dyed in a tint that suggested rather certain species of rare birds than a human being, who, running without pause (and, one would have said, without purpose) from one end of the room to the other, made me think of one of those macaws which fill the big aviaries in zoological gardens with their gorgeous colouring and incomprehensible agitation. Presently the spectacle assumed an order, in my eyes at least, growing at once more noble and more calm. All this dizzy activity became fixed in a quiet harmony. I looked at the round tables whose innumerable assemblage filled the restaurant like so many planets as planets are represented in old allegorical pictures. Moreover, there seemed to be some irresistibly attractive force at work among these divers stars, and at each table the diners had eyes only for the tables at which they were not sitting, except perhaps some wealthy amphitryon who, having managed to secure a famous author, was endeavouring to extract from him, thanks to the magic properties of the turning table, a few unimportant remarks at which the ladies marvelled. The harmony of these astral tables did not prevent the incessant revolution of the countless servants who, because instead of being seated like the diners they were on their feet, performed their evolutions in a more exalted sphere. No doubt they were running, one to fetch the *hors d'œuvres,* another to change the wine or with clean glasses. But despite these special reasons, their perpetual course among the round tables yielded, after a time, to the observer the law of its dizzy but ordered circulation. Seated behind a bank of flowers, two horrible cashiers, busy with endless calculations, seemed two witches occupied in forecasting by astrological signs the disasters that might from time to time occur in this celestial vault fashioned according to the scientific conceptions of the middle ages.

And I rather pitied all the diners because I felt that for them the round tables were not planets and that they had not cut through the scheme of things one of those sections which deliver us from the bondage of appearances and enable us to perceive analogies. They thought that they were dining with this or that person, that the dinner would cost roughly so much, and that to-morrow they would begin all over again. And they appeared absolutely unmoved by the progress through their midst of a train of young assistants who, having probably at that moment no urgent duty, advanced processionally bearing rolls of bread in baskets. Some of them, the youngest, stunned by the cuffs which the head waiters administered to them as they passed, fixed melancholy eyes upon a distant dream and were consoled only if some visitor from the Balbec hotel in which they had once been employed, recognising them, said a few words to them, telling them in person to take away the champagne which was not fit to drink, an order that filled them with pride.

I could hear the twinging of my nerves, in which there was a sense of comfort independent of the external objects that might have produced it, a comfort which the least shifting of my body or of my attention was enough to make me feel, just as to a shut eye a slight pressure gives the sensation of colour. I had already drunk a good deal of port wine, and if I now asked for more it was not so much with a view to the comfort which the additional glasses would bring me as an effect of the comfort produced by the glasses that had gone before. I allowed the music itself to guide to each of its notes my pleasure which, meekly following, rested on each in turn. If, like one of those chemical industries by means of which are prepared in large quantities bodies which in a state of nature come together only by accident and very rarely, this restaurant at Rivebelle united at one and the same moment more women to tempt me with beckoning vistas of happiness than the hazard of walks and drives would have made me encounter in a year; on the other hand, this music that greeted our ears,—arrangements of waltzes, of German operettas, of music-hall songs, all of them quite new to me—was itself like an ethereal resort of pleasure superimposed upon the other and more intoxicating still. For these tunes, each as individual as a woman, were not keeping, as she would have kept, for some privileged person, the voluptuous secret which they contained: they offered me their secrets, ogled me, came up to me with affected or vulgar movements, accosted me, caressed me as if I had suddenly become more seductive, more powerful and more rich; I indeed found in these tunes an element of cruelty; because any such thing as a disinterested feeling for beauty, a gleam of intelligence was unknown to them; for them physical pleasures alone existed. And they are the most merciless of hells, the most gateless and imprisoning for the jealous wretch to whom they present that pleasure—that pleasure which the woman he loves is enjoying with another—as the only thing that exists in the world for her who is all the world to him. But while I was humming softly to myself the notes of this tune, and returning its kiss, the pleasure peculiar to itself which it made me feel became so dear to me that I would have left my father and mother, to follow it through the singular world which it constructed in the invisible, in lines instinct with alternate languor and vivacity. Although such a pleasure as this is not calculated to enhance the value of the person to whom it comes, for it is perceived by him alone, and although whenever, in the course of our life, we have failed to attract a woman who has caught sight of us, she could not tell whether at that moment we possessed this inward and subjective felicity which, consequently, could in no way have altered the judgment that she passed on us, I felt myself more powerful, almost irresistible. It seemed to me that my love was no longer something unattractive, at which people might smile, but had precisely the touching beauty, the seductiveness of this music, itself comparable to a friendly atmosphere in which she whom I loved and I were to meet, suddenly grown intimate.

This restaurant was the resort not only of light women; it was frequented also by people in the very best society, who came there for afternoon tea or gave big dinner-parties. The tea-parties were held in a long gallery, glazed and narrow, shaped like a funnel, which led from the entrance hall to the dining-room and was bounded on one side by the garden, from which it was separated (save for a few stone pillars) only by its wall of glass, in which panes would be opened here and there. The result of which, apart from ubiquitous draughts, was sudden and intermittent bursts of sunshine, a dazzling light that made it almost impossible to see the tea-drinkers, so that when they were installed there, at tables crowded pair after pair the whole way along the narrow gully, as they were shot with colours at every movement they made in drinking their tea or in greeting one another, you would have called it a reservoir, a stewpond in which the fisherman has collected all his glittering catch, and the fish, half out of water and bathed in sunlight, dazzle the eye as they mirror an ever-changing iridescence.

A few hours later, during dinner, which, naturally, was served in the dining-room, the lights would be turned on, although it was still quite light out of doors, so that one saw before one's eyes, in the garden, among summer-houses glimmering in the twilight, like pale spectres of evening, alleys whose greyish verdure was pierced by the last rays of the setting sun and, from the lamp-lit room in which we were dining, appeared through the glass —no longer, as one would have said of the ladies who had been drinking tea there in the afternoon, along the blue and gold corridor, caught in a glittering and dripping net—but like the vegetation of a pale and green aquarium of gigantic size seen by a supernatural light. People began to rise from table; and if each party while their dinner lasted, albeit they spent the whole time examining, recognising, naming the party at the next table, had been held in perfect cohesion about their own, the attractive force that had kept them gravitating round their host of the evening lost its power at the moment when, for coffee, they repaired to the same corridor that had been used for the tea-parties; it often happened that in its passage from place to place some party on the march dropped one or more of its human corpuscles who, having come under the irresistible attraction of the rival party, detached themselves for a moment from their own, in which their places were taken by ladies or gentlemen who had come across to speak to friends before hurrying off with an "I really must fly: I'm dining with M. So-and-So." And for the moment you would have been reminded, looking at them, of two separate nosegays that had exchanged a few of their flowers. Then the corridor too began to empty. Often, since even after dinner there was still a little light left outside, they left this long corridor unlighted, and, skirted by the trees that overhung it on the other side of the glass, it suggested a pleached alley in a wooded and shady garden. Here and there, in the gloom, a fair diner lingered. As I passed through this corridor one evening on my way out I saw, sitting among a group of strangers, the beautiful Princesse de Luxembourg. I raised my hat without stopping. She remembered me, and bowed her head with a smile; in the air, far above her bowed head, but emanating from the movement, rose melodiously a few words addressed to myself, which must have been a somewhat amplified good-evening, intended not to stop me but simply to complete the gesture, to make it a spoken greeting. But her words remained so indistinct and the sound which was all that I caught was prolonged so sweetly and seemed to me so musical that it seemed as if among the dim branches of the trees a nightingale had begun to sing. If it so happened that, to finish the evening with a party of his friends whom we had met, Saint-Loup decided to go on to the Casino of a neighbouring village, and, taking them with him, put me in a carriage by myself, I would urge the driver to go as fast as he possibly could, so that the minutes might pass less slowly which I must spend without having anyone at hand to dispense me from the obligation myself to provide my sensibility—reversing the engine, so to speak, and emerging from the passivity in which I was caught and held as in the teeth of a machine—with those modifications which, since my arrival at Rivebelle, I had been receiving from other people. The risk of collision with a carriage coming the other way along those lanes where there was barely room for one and it was dark as pitch, the insecurity of the soil, crumbling in many places, at the cliff's edge, the proximity of its vertical drop to the sea, none of these things exerted on me the slight stimulus that would have been required to bring the vision and the fear of danger within the scope of my reasoning. For just as it is not the desire to become famous but the habit of being laborious that enables us to produce a finished work, so it is not the activity of the present moment but wise reflexions from the past that help us to safeguard the future. But if already, before this point, on my arrival at Rivebelle, I had flung irretrievably away from me those crutches of reason and self-control which help our infirmity to follow the right road, if I now found myself the victim of a sort of moral ataxy, the alcohol that I had drunk, by unduly straining my nerves, gave to the minutes as they came a quality, a charm which did not have the result of leaving me more ready, or indeed more resolute to inhibit them, prevent their coming; for while it made me prefer them a thousand times to anything else in my life, my exaltation made me isolate them from everything else; I was confined to the present, as heroes are or drunkards; eclipsed for the moment, my past no longer projected before me that shadow of itself which we call our future; placing the goal of my life no longer in the realisation of the dreams of that past, but in the felicity of the present moment, I could see nothing now of what lay beyond it. So that, by a contradiction which, however, was only apparent, it was at the very moment in which I was tasting an unfamiliar pleasure, feeling that my life might yet be happy, in which it should have become more precious in my sight; it was at this very moment that, delivered from the anxieties which my life had hitherto contrived to suggest to me, I unhesitatingly abandoned it to the chance of an accident. After all, I was doing no more than concentrate in a single evening the carelessness that, for most men, is diluted throughout their whole existence, in which every day they face, unnecessarily, the dangers of a sea-voyage, of a trip in an aeroplane or motor-car, when there is waiting for them at home the creature whose life their death would shatter, or when there is still stored in the fragile receptacle of their brain that book the approaching publication of which is their one object, now, in life. And so too in the Rivebelle restaurant, on evenings when we just stayed there after dinner, if anyone had come in with the intention of killing me, as I no longer saw, save in a distant prospect too remote to have any reality, my grandmother, my life to come, the books that I was going to write, as I clung now, body and mind, wholly to the scent of the lady at the next table, the politeness of the waiters, the outline of the waltz that the band was playing, as I was glued to my immediate sensation, with no extension beyond its limits, nor any object other than not to be separated from it, I should have died in and with that sensation, I should have let myself be strangled without offering any resistance, without a movement, a bee drugged with tobacco smoke that had ceased to take any thought for preserving the accumulation of its labours and the hopes of its hive.

I ought here to add that this insignificance into which the most serious matters subsided, by contrast with the violence of my exaltation, came in the end to include Mlle. Simonet and her friends. The enterprise of knowing them seemed to me easy now but hardly worth the trouble, for my immediate sensation alone, thanks to its extraordinary intensity, to the joy that its slightest modifications, its mere continuity provoked, had any importance for me; all the rest—parents, work, pleasures, girls at Balbec weighed with me no more than does a flake of foam in a strong wind that will not let it find a resting place, existed no longer save in relation to this internal power: intoxication makes real for an hour or two a subjective idealism, pure phenomenism; nothing is left now but appearances, nothing exists save as a function of our sublime self. This is not to say that a genuine love, if we have one, cannot survive in such conditions. But we feel so unmistakably, as though in a new atmosphere, that unknown pressures have altered the dimensions of that sentiment that we can no longer consider it in the old way. It is indeed still there and we shall find it, but in a different place, no longer weighing upon us, satisfied by the sensation which the present affords it, a sensation that is sufficient for us, since for what is not actually present we take no thought. Unfortunately the coefficient which thus alters our values alters them only in the hour of intoxication. The people who had lost all their importance, whom we scattered with our breath like soap-bubbles, will to-morrow resume their density; we shall have to try afresh to settle down to work which this evening had ceased to have any significance. A more serious matter still, these mathematics of the morrow, the same as those of yesterday, in whose problems we shall find ourselves inexorably involved, it is they that govern us even in these hours, and we alone are unconscious of their rule. If there should happen to be, near us, a woman, virtuous or inimical, that question so difficult an hour ago—to know whether we should succeed in finding favour with her—seems to us now a million times easier of solution without having become easier in any respect, for it is only in our own sight, in our own inward sight, that we have altered. And she is as much annoyed with us at this moment as we shall be next day at the thought of our having given a hundred francs to the messenger, and for the same reason which in our case has merely been delayed in its operation, namely the absence of intoxication.

I knew none of the women who were at Rivebelle and, because they formed a part of my intoxication just as its reflexions form part of a mirror, appeared to me now a thousand times more to be desired than the less and less existent Mlle. Simonet. One of them, young, fair, by herself, with a sad expression on a face framed in a straw hat trimmed with field-flowers, gazed at me for a moment with a dreamy air and struck me as being attractive. Then it was the turn of another, and of a third; finally of a dark one with glowing cheeks. Almost all of them were known, if not to myself, to Saint-Loup.

He had, in fact, before he made the acquaintance of his present mistress, lived so much in the restricted world of amorous adventure that all the women who would be dining on these evenings at Rivebelle, where many of them had appeared quite by chance, having come to the coast some to join their lovers, others in the hope of finding fresh lovers there, there was scarcely one that he did not know from having spent—or if not he, one or other of his friends—at least one night in their company. He did not bow to them if they were with men, and they, albeit they looked more at him than at anyone else, for the indifference which he was known to feel towards every woman who was not his mistress gave him in their eyes an exceptional interest, appeared not to know him. But you could hear them whispering: "That's young Saint-Loup. It seems he's still quite gone on that girl of his. Got it bad, he has. What a dear boy! I think he's just wonderful; and what style! Some girls do have all the luck, don't they? And he's so nice in every way. I saw a lot of him when I was with d'Orléans. They were quite inseparable, those two. He was going the pace, that time. But he's given it all up now, she can't complain. She's had a good run of luck, that she can say. And I ask you, what in the world can he see in her? He must be a bit of a chump, when all's said and done. She's got feet like boats, whiskers like an American, and her undies are filthy. I can tell you, a little shop girl would be ashamed to be seen in her knickers. Do just look at his eyes a moment; you would jump into the fire for a man like that. Hush, don't say a word; he's seen me; look, he's smiling. Oh, he remembers me all right. Just you mention my name to him, and see what he says!" Between these girls and him I surprised a glance of mutual understanding. I should have liked him to introduce me to them, so that I might ask them for assignations and they give them to me, even if I had been unable to keep them. For otherwise their appearance would remain for all time devoid, in my memory, of that part of itself—just as though it had been hidden by a veil—which varies in every woman, which we cannot imagine in any woman until we have actually seen it in her, and which is apparent only in the glance that she directs at us, that acquiesces in our desire and promises that it shall be satisfied. And yet, even when thus reduced, their aspect was for me far more than that of women whom I should have known to be virtuous, and it seemed to me not to be, like theirs, flat, with nothing behind it, fashioned in one piece with no solidity. It was not, of course, for me what it must be for Saint-Loup who, by an act of memory, beneath the indifference, transparent to him, of the motionless features which affected not to know him, or beneath the dull formality of the greeting that might equally well have been addressed to anyone else, could recall, could see, through dishevelled locks, a swooning mouth, a pair of half-closed eyes, a whole silent picture like those that painters, to cheat their visitors' senses, drape with a decent covering. Undoubtedly, for me who felt that nothing of my personality had penetrated the surface of this woman or that, or would be borne by her upon the unknown ways which she would tread through life, those faces remained sealed. But it was quite enough to know that they did open, for them to seem to me of a price which I should not have set on them had they been but precious medals, instead of lockets within which were hidden memories of love. As for Robert, scarcely able to keep in his place at table, concealing beneath a courtier's smile his warrior's thirst for action—when I examined him I could see how closely the vigorous structure of his triangular face must have been modelled on that of his ancestors' faces, a face devised rather for an ardent bowman than for a delicate student. Beneath his fine skin the bold construction, the feudal architecture were apparent. His head made one think of those old dungeon keeps on which the disused battlements are still to be seen, although inside they have been converted into libraries.

On our way back to Balbec, of those of the fair strangers to whom he had introduced me I would repeat to myself without a moment's interruption, and yet almost unconsciously: "What a delightful woman!" as one chimes in with the refrain of a song. I admit that these words were prompted rather by the state of my nerves than by any lasting judgment. It was nevertheless true that if I had had a thousand francs on me and if there had still been a jeweller's shop open at that hour, I should have bought the lady a ring. When the successive hours of our life are thus displayed against too widely dissimilar backgrounds, we find that we give away too much of ourselves to all sorts of people who next day will not interest us in the least. But we feel that we are still responsible for what we said to them overnight, and that we must honour our promises.

As on these evenings I came back later than usual to the hotel, it was with joy that I recognised, in a room no longer hostile, the bed on which, on the day of my arrival, I had supposed that it would always be impossible for me to find any rest, whereas now my weary limbs turned to it for support; so that, in turn, thighs, hips, shoulders burrowed into, trying to adhere at every angle to, the sheets that covered its mattress, as if my fatigue, like a sculptor, had wished to take a cast of an entire human body. But I could not go to sleep; I felt the approach of morning; peace of mind, health of body, were no longer mine. In my distress it seemed that never should I recapture them. I should have had to sleep for a long time if I were to overtake them. But then, had I begun to doze, I must in any event be awakened in a couple of hours by the symphonic concert on the beach. Suddenly I was asleep, I had fallen into that deep slumber in which are opened to us a return to childhood, the recapture of past years, of lost feelings, the disincarnation, the transmigration of the soul, the evoking of the dead, the illusions of madness, retrogression towards the most elementary of the natural kingdoms (for we say that we often see animals in our dreams, but we forget almost always that we are ourself then an animal deprived of that reasoning power which projects upon things the light of certainty; we present on the contrary to the spectacle of life only a dubious vision, destroyed afresh every moment by oblivion, the former reality fading before that which follows it as one projection of a magic lantern fades before the next as we change the slide), all those mysteries which we imagine ourselves not to know and into which we are in reality initiated almost every night, as we are into the other great mystery of annihilation and resurrection. Rendered more vagabond by the difficulty of digesting my Rivebelle dinner, the successive and flickering illumination of shadowy zones of my past made of me a being whose supreme happiness would have been that of meeting Legrandin, with whom I had just been talking in my dream.

And then, even my own life was entirely hidden from me by a new setting, like the 'drop' lowered right at the front of the stage before which, while the scene shifters are busy behind, actors appear in a fresh 'turn.' The turn in which I was now cast for a part was in the manner of an Oriental fairy-tale; I retained no knowledge of my past or of myself, on account of the intense proximity of this interpolated scenery; I was merely a person who received the bastinado and underwent various punishments for a crime the nature of which I could not distinguish, though it was actually that of having taken too much port wine. Suddenly I awoke and discovered that, thanks to a long sleep, I had not heard a note of the concert. It was already afternoon; I verified this by my watch after several efforts to sit up in bed, efforts fruitless at first and interrupted by backward falls on to my pillow, but those short falls which are a sequel of sleep as of other forms of intoxication, whether due to wine or to convalescence; besides, before I had so much as looked at the time, I was certain that it was past midday. Last night I had been nothing more than an empty vessel, without weight, and (since I must first have gone to bed to be able to keep still, and have been asleep to be able to keep silent) had been unable to refrain from moving about and talking; I had no longer any stability, any centre of gravity, I was set in motion and it seemed that I might have continued on my dreary course until I reached the moon. But if, while I slept, my eyes had not seen the time, my body had nevertheless contrived to calculate it, had measured the hours; not on a dial superficially marked and figured, but by the steadily growing weight of all my replenished forces which, like a powerful clockwork, it had allowed, notch by notch, to descend from my brain into the rest of my body in which there had risen now to above my knees the unbroken abundance of their store. If it is true that the sea was once upon a time our native element, into which we must plunge our cooling blood if we are to recover our strength, it is the same with the oblivion, the mental non-existence of sleep; we seem then to absent ourselves for a few hours from Time, but the forces which we have gathered in that interval without expending them, measure it by their quantity as accurately as the pendulum of the clock or the crumbling pyramid of the sandglass. Nor does one emerge more easily from such sleep than from a prolonged spell of wakefulness, so strongly does everything tend to persist; and if it is true that certain narcotics make us sleep, to have slept for any time is an even stronger narcotic, after which we have great difficulty in making ourselves wake up. Like a sailor who sees plainly the harbour in which he can moor his vessel, still tossed by the waves, I had a quite definite idea of looking at the time and of getting up, but my body was at every moment cast back upon the tide of sleep; the landing was difficult, and before I attained a position in which I could reach my watch and confront with its time that indicated by the wealth of accumulated material which my stiffened limbs had at their disposal, I fell back two or three times more upon my pillow.

At length I could reach and read it: "Two o'clock in the afternoon!" I rang; but at once I returned to a slumber which, this time, must have lasted infinitely longer, if I was to judge by the refreshment, the vision of an immense night overpassed, which I found on awakening. And yet as my awakening was caused by the entry of Françoise, and as her entry had been prompted by my ringing the bell, this second sleep which, it seemed to me, must have been longer than the other, and had brought me so much comfort and forgetfulness, could not have lasted for more than half a minute.

My grandmother opened the door of my bedroom; I asked her various questions about the Legrandin family.

It is not enough to say that I had returned to tranquillity and health, for it was more than a mere interval of space that had divided them from me yesterday, I had had all night long to struggle against a contrary tide, and now I not only found myself again in their presence, they had once more entered into me. At certain definite and still somewhat painful points beneath the surface of my empty head which would one day be broken, letting my ideas escape for all time, those ideas had once again taken their proper places and resumed that existence by which hitherto, alas, they had failed to profit.

Once again I had escaped from the impossibility of sleeping, from the deluge, the shipwreck of my nervous storms. I feared now not at all the menaces that had loomed over me the evening before, when I was dismantled of repose. A new life was opening before me; without making a single movement, for I was still shattered, although quite alert and well, I savoured my weariness with a light heart; it had isolated and broken asunder the bones of my legs and arms, which I could feel assembled before me, ready to cleave together, and which I was to raise to life merely by singing, like the builder in the fable.

Suddenly I thought of the fair girl with the sad expression whom I had seen at Rivebelle, where she had looked at me for a moment. Many others, in the course of the evening, had seemed to me attractive; now she alone arose from the dark places of my memory. I had felt that she noticed me, had expected one of the waiters to come to me with a whispered message from her. Saint-Loup did not know her and fancied that she was respectable. It would be very difficult to see her, to see her constantly. But I was prepared to make any sacrifice, I thought now only of her. Philosophy distinguishes often between free and necessary acts. Perhaps there is none to the necessity of which we are more completely subjected than that which, by virtue of an ascending power held in check during the act itself, makes so unfailingly (once our mind is at rest) spring up a memory that was levelled with other memories by the distributed pressure of our indifferance, and rush to the surface, because unknown to us it contained, more than any of the others, a charm of which we do not become aware until the following day. And perhaps there is not, either, any act so free, for it is still unprompted by habit, by that sort of mental hallucination which, when we are in love, facilitates the invariable reappearance of the image of one particular person.

This was the day immediately following that on which I had seen file past me against a background of sea the beautiful procession of young girls. I put questions about them to a number of the visitors in the hotel, people who came almost every year to Balbec. They could tell me nothing. Later on, a photograph shewed me why. Who could ever recognise now in them, scarcely and yet quite definitely beyond an age in which one changes so utterly, that amorphous, delicious mass, still wholly infantine, of little girls who, only a few years back, might have been seen sitting in a ring on the sand round a tent; a sort of white and vague constellation in which one would have distinguished a pair of eyes that sparkled more than the rest, a mischievous face, flaxen hair, only to lose them again and to confound them almost at once in the indistinct and milky nebula.

No doubt, in those earlier years that were still so recent, it was not, as it had been yesterday when they appeared for the first time before me, one's impression of the group, but the group itself that had been lacking in clearness. Then those children, mere babies, had been still at that elementary stage in their formation when personality has not set its seal on every face. Like those primitive organisms in which the individual barely exists by itself, consists in the reef rather than in the coral insects that compose it, they were still pressed one against another. Sometimes one pushed her neighbour over, and then a wild laugh, which seemed the sole manifestation of their personal life, convulsed them all at once, obliterating, confounding those indefinite, grinning faces in the congealment of a single cluster, scintillating and tremulous. In an old photograph of themselves, which they were one day to give me, and which I have kept ever since, their infantile troop already presents the same number of participants as, later, their feminine procession; one can see from it that their presence must, even then, have made on the beach an unusual mark which forced itself on the attention; but one cannot recognise them individually in it save by a process of reasoning, leaving a clear field to all the transformations possible during girlhood, up to the point at which one reconstructed form would begin to encroach upon another individuality, which must be identified also, and whose handsome face, owing to the accessories of a large build and curly hair, may quite possibly have been, once, that wizened and impish little grin which the photograph album presents to us; and the distance traversed in a short interval of time by the physical characteristics of each of these girls making of them a criterion too vague to be of any use, whereas what they had in common and, so to speak, collectively, had at that early date been strongly marked, it sometimes happened that even their most intimate friends mistook one for another in this photograph, so much so that the question could in the last resort be settled only by some detail of costume which one of them could be certain that she herself, and not any of the others, had worn. Since those days, so different from the day on which I had just seen them strolling along the 'front,' so different and yet so close in time, they still gave way to fits of laughter, as I had observed that afternoon, but to laughter of a kind that was no longer the intermittent and almost automatic laughter of childhood, a spasmodic discharge which, in those days, had continually sent their heads dipping out of the circle, as the clusters of minnows in the Vivonne used to scatter and vanish only to gather again a moment later; each countenance was now mistress of itself, their eyes were fixed on the goal towards which they were marching; and it had taken, yesterday, the indecision and tremulousness of my first impression to make me confuse vaguely (as their childish hilarity and the old photograph had confused) the spores now individualised and disjoined of the pale madrepore.

Repeatedly, I dare say, when pretty girls went by, I had promised myself that I would see them again. As a rule, people do not appear a second time; moreover our memory, which speedily forgets their existence, would find it difficult to recall their appearance; our eyes would not recognise them, perhaps, and in the meantime we have seen new girls go by, whom we shall not see again either. But at other times, and this was what was to happen with the pert little band at Balbec, chance brings them back insistently before our eyes. Chance seems to us then a good and useful thing, for we discern in it as it were rudiments of organisation, of an attempt to arrange our life; and it makes easy to us, inevitable, and sometimes—after interruptions that have made us hope that we may cease to remember—cruel, the retention in our minds of images to the possession of which we shall come in time to believe that we were predestined, and which but for chance we should from the very first have managed to forget, like so many others, with so little difficulty.

Presently Saint-Loup's visit drew to an end. I had not seen that party of girls again on the beach. He was too little at Balbec in the afternoons to have time to bother about them, or to attempt, in my interest, to make their acquaintance. In the evenings he was more free, and continued to take me constantly to Rivebelle. There are, in those restaurants, as there are in public gardens and railway trains, people embodied in a quite ordinary appearance, whose name astonishes us when, having happened to ask it, we discover that this is not the mere inoffensive stranger whom we supposed but nothing less than the Minister or Duke of whom we have so often heard. Two or three times already, in the Rivebelle restaurant, we had—Saint-Loup and I—seen come in and sit down at a table when everyone else was getting ready to go, a man of large stature, very muscular, with regular features and a grizzled beard, gazing, with concentrated attention, into the empty air. One evening, on our asking the landlord who was this obscure, solitary and belated diner, "What!" he exclaimed, "do you mean to say you don't know the famous painter Elstir?" Swann had once mentioned his name to me, I had entirely forgotten in what connexion; but the omission of a particular memory, like that of part of a sentence when we are reading, leads sometimes not to uncertainty but to a birth of certainty that is premature. "He is a friend of Swann, a very well known artist, extremely good," I told Saint-Loup. Whereupon there passed over us both, like a wave of emotion, the thought that Elstir was a great artist, a celebrated man, and that, confounding us with the rest of the diners, he had no suspicion of the ecstasy into which we were thrown by the idea of his talent. Doubtless, his unconsciousness of our admiration and of our acquaintance with Swann would not have troubled us had we not been at the seaside. But since we were still at an age when enthusiasm cannot keep silence, and had been transported into a life in which not to be known is unendurable, we wrote a letter, signed with both our names, in which we revealed to Elstir in the two diners seated within a few feet of him two passionate admirers of his talent, two friends of his great friend Swann, and asked to be allowed to pay our homage to him in person. A waiter undertook to convey this missive to the celebrity.

A celebrity Elstir was, perhaps, not yet at this period quite to the extent claimed by the landlord, though he was to reach the height of his fame within a very few years. But he had been one of the first to frequent this restaurant when it was still only a sort of farmhouse, and had brought to it a whole colony of artists (who had all, as it happened, migrated elsewhere as soon as the farm-yard in which they used to feed in the open air, under a lean-to roof, had become a fashionable centre); Elstir himself had returned to Rivebelle this evening only on account of a temporary absence of his wife, from the house which he had taken in the neighbourhood. But great talent, even when its existence is not yet recognised, will inevitably provoke certain phenomena of admiration, such as the landlord had managed to detect in the questions asked by more than one English lady visitor, athirst for information as to the life led by Elstir, or in the number of letters that he received from abroad. Then the landlord had further remarked that Elstir did not like to be disturbed when he was working, that he would rise in the middle of the night and take a little model down to the water's edge to pose for him, nude, if the moon was shining; and had told himself that so much labour was not in vain, nor the admiration of the tourists unjustified when he had, in one of Elstir's pictures, recognised a wooden cross which stood by the roadside as you came into Rivebelle.

"It's all right!" he would repeat with stupefaction, "there are all the four beams! Oh, he does take a lot of trouble!"

And he did not know whether a little *Sunrise Over the Sea* which Elstir had given him might not be worth a fortune.

We watched him read our letter, put it in his pocket, finish his dinner, begin to ask for his things, get up to go; and we were so convinced that we had shocked him by our overture that we would now have hoped (as keenly as at first we had dreaded) to make our escape without his noticing us. We did not bear in mind for a single instant a consideration which should, nevertheless, have seemed to us most important, namely that our enthusiasm for Elstir, on the sincerity of which we should not have allowed the least doubt to be cast, which we could indeed have supported with the evidence of our breathing arrested by expectancy, our desire to do no matter what that was difficult or heroic for the great man, was not, as we imagined it to be, admiration, since neither of us had ever seen anything that he had painted; our feeling might have as its object the hollow idea of a 'great artist,' but not a body of work which was unknown to us. It was, at the most, admiration in the abstract, the nervous envelope, the sentimental structure of an admiration without content, that is to say a thing as indissolubly attached to boyhood as are certain organs which have ceased to exist in the adult man; we were still boys. Elstir meanwhile was reaching the door when suddenly he turned and came towards us. I was transported by a delicious thrill of terror such as I could not have felt a few years later, because, while age diminishes our capacity, familiarity with the world has meanwhile destroyed in us any inclination to provoke such strange encounters, to feel that kind of emotion.

In the course of the few words that Elstir had come back to say to us, sitting down at our table, he never gave any answer on the several occasions on which I spoke to him of Swann. I began to think that he did not know him. He asked me, nevertheless, to come and see him at his Balbec studio, an invitation which he did not extend to Saint-Loup, and which I had earned (as I might not, perhaps, from Swann's recommendation, had Elstir been intimate with him, for the part played by disinterested motives is greater than we are inclined to think in people's lives) by a few words which made him think that I was devoted to the arts. He lavished on me a friendliness which was as far above that of Saint-Loup as that was above the affability of a mere tradesman. Compared with that of a great artist, the friendliness of a great gentleman, charming as it may be, has the effect of an actor's playing a part, of being feigned. Saint-Loup sought to please; Elstir loved to give, to give himself. Everything that he possessed, ideas, work, and the rest which he counted for far less, he would have given gladly to anyone who could understand him. But, failing society that was endurable, he lived in an isolation, with a savagery which fashionable people called pose and ill-breeding, public authorities a recalcitrant spirit, his neighbours madness, his family selfishness and pride.

And no doubt at first he had thought, even in his solitude, with enjoyment that, thanks to his work, he was addressing, in spite of distance, he was giving a loftier idea of himself, to those who had misunderstood or hurt him. Perhaps, in those days, he lived alone not from indifference but from love of his fellows, and, just as I had renounced Gilberte to appear to her again one day in more attractive colours, dedicated his work to certain people as a way of approaching them again, by which without actually seeing him they would be made to love him, admire him, talk about him; a renunciation is not always complete from the start, when we decide upon it in our original frame of mind and before it has reacted upon us, whether it be the renunciation of an invalid, a monk, an artist or a hero. But if he had wished to produce with certain people in his mind, in producing he had lived for himself, remote from the society to which he had become indifferent; the practice of solitude had given him a love for it, as happens with every big thing which we have begun by fearing, because we knew it to be incompatible with smaller things to which we clung, and of which it does not so much deprive us as it detaches us from them. Before we experience it, our whole preoccupation is to know to what extent we can reconcile it with certain pleasures which cease to be pleasures as soon as we have experienced it.

Elstir did not stay long talking to us. I made up my mind that I would go to his studio during the next few days, but on the following afternoon, when I had accompanied my grandmother right to the point at which the 'front' ended, near the cliffs of Canapville, on our way back, at the foot of one of the little streets which ran down at right angles to the beach, we came upon a girl who, with lowered head like an animal that is being driven reluctant to its stall, and carrying golf-clubs, was walking in front of a person in authority, in all probability her or her friends' 'Miss,' who suggested a portrait of Jeffreys by Hogarth, with a face as red as if her favourite beverage were gin rather than tea, on which a dried smear of tobacco at the corner of her mouth prolonged the curve of a moustache that was grizzled but abundant. The girl who preceded her was like that one of the little band who, beneath a black polo-cap, had shewn in an inexpressive chubby face a pair of laughing eyes. Now, the girl who was now passing me had also a black polo-cap, but she struck me as being even prettier than the other, the line of her nose was straighter, the curve of nostril at its base fuller and more fleshy. Besides, the other had seemed a proud, pale girl, this one a child well-disciplined and of rosy complexion. And yet, as she was pushing a bicycle just like the other's, and was wearing the same reindeer gloves, I concluded that the differences arose perhaps from the angle and circumstances in which I now saw her, for it was hardly likely that there could be at Balbec a second girl, with a face that, when all was said, was so similar and with the same details in her accoutrements. She cast a rapid glance in my direction; for the next few days, when I saw the little band again on the beach, and indeed long afterwards when I knew all the girls who composed it, I could never be absolutely certain that any of them—even she who among them all was most like her, the girl with the bicycle—was indeed the one that I had seen that evening at the end of the 'front,' where a street ran down to the beach, a girl who differed hardly at all, but was still just perceptibly different from her whom I had noticed in the procession.

From that moment, whereas for the last few days my mind had been occupied chiefly by the tall one, it was the one with the golf-clubs, presumed to be Mlle. Simonet, who began once more to absorb my attention. When walking with the others she would often stop, forcing her friends, who seemed greatly to respect her, to stop also. Thus it is, calling a halt, her eyes sparkling beneath her polo-cap, that I see her again to-day, outlined against the screen which the sea spreads out behind her, and separated from me by a transparent, azure space, the interval of time that has elapsed since then, a first impression, faint and fine in my memory, desired, pursued, then forgotten, then found again, of a face which I have many times since projected upon the cloud of the past to be able to say to myself, of a girl who was actually in my room: "It is she!"

But it was perhaps yet another, the one with geranium cheeks and green eyes, whom I should have liked most to know. And yet, whichever of them it might be, on any given day, that I preferred to see, the others, without her, were sufficient to excite my desire which, concentrated now chiefly on one, now on another, continued—as, on the first day, my confused vision—to combine and blend them, to make of them the little world apart, animated by a life in common, which for that matter they doubtless imagined themselves to form; and I should have penetrated, in becoming a friend of one of them—like a cultivated pagan or a meticulous Christian going among barbarians—into a rejuvenating society in which reigned health, unconsciousness of others, sensual pleasures, cruelty, unintellectuality and joy.

My grandmother, who had been told of my meeting with Elstir, and rejoiced at the thought of all the intellectual profit that I might derive from his friendship, considered it absurd and none too polite of me not to have gone yet to pay him a visit. But I could think only of the little band, and being uncertain of the hour at which the girls would be passing along the front, I dared not absent myself. My grandmother was astonished, too, at the smartness of my attire, for I had suddenly remembered suits which had been lying all this time at the bottom of my trunk. I put on a different one every day, and had even written to Paris ordering new hats and neckties.

It adds a great charm to life in a watering-place like Balbec if the face of a pretty girl, a vendor of shells, cakes or flowers, painted in vivid colours in our mind, is regularly, from early morning, the purpose of each of those leisured, luminous days which we spend upon the beach. They become then, and for that reason, albeit unoccupied by any business, as alert as working-days, pointed, magnetised, raised slightly to meet an approaching moment, that in which, while we purchase sand-cakes, roses, ammonites, we will delight in seeing upon a feminine face its colours displayed as purely as on a flower. But at least, with these little traffickers, first of all we can speak to them, which saves us from having to construct with our imagination their aspects other than those with which the mere visual perception of them furnishes us, and to recreate their life, magnifying its charm, as when we stand before a portrait; moreover, just because we speak to them, we can learn where and at what time it will be possible to see them again. Now I had none of these advantages with respect to the little band. Their habits were unknown to me; when on certain days I failed to catch a glimpse of them, not knowing the cause of their absence I sought to discover whether it was something fixed and regular, if they were to be seen only every other day, or in certain states of the weather, or if there were days on which no one ever saw them. I imagined myself already friends with them, and saying: "But you weren't there the other day?" "Weren't we? Oh, no, of course not; that was because it was a Saturday. On Saturdays we don't ever come, because . . ." If it were only as simple as that, to know that on black Saturday it was useless to torment oneself, that one might range the beach from end to end, sit down outside the pastry-cook's and pretend to be nibbling an *éclair*, poke into the curiosity shop, wait for bathing time, the concert, high tide, sunset, night, all without seeing the longed-for little band. But the fatal day did not, perhaps, come once a week. It did not, perhaps, of necessity fall on Saturdays. Perhaps certain atmospheric conditions influenced it or were entirely unconnected with it. How many observations, patient but not at all serene, must one accumulate of the movements, to all appearance irregular, of those unknown worlds before being able to be sure that one has not allowed oneself to be led astray by mere coincidence, that one's forecasts will not be proved wrong, before one elucidates the certain laws, acquired at the cost of so much painful experience, of that passionate astronomy. Remembering that I had not yet seen them on some particular day of the week, I assured myself that they would not be coming, that it was useless to wait any longer on the beach. And at that very moment I caught sight of them. And yet on another day which, so far as I could suppose that there were laws that guided the return of those constellations, must, I had calculated, prove an auspicious day, they did not come. But to this primary uncertainty whether I should see them or not that day, there was added another, more disquieting: whether I should ever set eyes on them again, for I had no reason, after all, to know that they were not about to sail for America, or to return to Paris. This was enough to make me begin to love them. One can feel an attraction towards a particular person. But to release that fount of sorrow, that sense of the irreparable, those agonies which prepare the way for love, there must be—and this is, perhaps, more than any person can be, the actual object which our passion seeks so anxiously to embrace—the risk of an impossibility. Thus there were acting upon me already those influences which recur in the course of our successive love-affairs, which can, for that matter, be provoked (but then rather in the life of cities) by the thought of little working girls whose half-holiday is we know not on what day, and whom we are afraid of having missed as they came out of the factory; or which at least have recurred in mine. Perhaps they are inseparable from love; perhaps everything that formed a distinctive feature of our first love attaches itself to those that come after, by recollection, suggestion, habit, and through the successive periods of our life gives to its different aspects a general character.

I seized every pretext for going down to the beach at the hours when I hoped to succeed in finding them there. Having caught sight of them once while we were at luncheon, I now invariably came in late for it, waiting interminably upon the 'front' for them to pass; devoting all the short time that I did spend in the dining-room to interrogating with my eyes its azure wall of glass; rising long before the dessert, so as not to miss them should they have gone out at a different hour, and chafing with irritation at my grandmother, when, with unwitting malevolence, she made me stay with her past the hour that seemed to me propitious. I tried to prolong the horizon by setting my chair aslant; if, by chance, I did catch sight of no matter which of the girls, since they all partook of the same special essence, it was as if I had seen projected before my face in a shifting, diabolical hallucination, a little of the unfriendly and yet passionately coveted dream which, but a moment ago, had existed only—where it lay stagnant for all time—in my brain.

I was in love with none of them, loving them all, and yet the possibility of meeting them was in my daily life the sole element of delight, alone made to burgeon in me those high hopes by which every obstacle is surmounted, hopes ending often in fury if I had not seen them. For the moment, these girls eclipsed my grandmother in my affection; the longest journey would at once have seemed attractive to me had it been to a place in which they might be found. It was to them that my thoughts comfortably clung when I supposed myself to be thinking of something else or of nothing. But when, even without knowing it, I thought of them, they, more unconsciously still, were for me the mountainous blue undulations of the sea, a troop seen passing in outline against the waves. Our most intensive love for a person is always the love, really, of something else as well.

Meanwhile my grandmother was shewing, because now I was keenly interested in golf and lawn-tennis and was letting slip an opportunity of seeing at work and hearing talk an artist whom she knew to be one of the greatest of his time, a disapproval which seemed to me to be based on somewhat narrow views. I had guessed long ago in the Champs-Elysées, and had since established to my own satisfaction, that when we are in love with a woman we simply project into her a state of our own soul, that the important thing is, therefore, not the worth of the woman but the depth of the state; and that the emotions which a young girl of no kind of distinction arouses in us can enable us to bring to the surface of our consciousness some of the most intimate parts of our being, more personal, more remote, more essential than would be reached by the pleasure that we derive from the conversation of a great man or even from the admiring contemplation of his work.

I was to end by complying with my grandmother's wishes, all the more reluctantly in that Elstir lived at some distance from the 'front' in one of the newest of Balbec's avenues. The heat of the day obliged me to take the tramway which passed along the Rue de la Plage, and I made an effort (so as still to believe that I was in the ancient realm of the Cimmerians, in the country it might be, of King Mark, or upon the site of the Forest of Broceliande) not to see the gimcrack splendour of the buildings that extended on either hand, among which Elstir's villa was perhaps the most sumptuously hideous, in spite of which he had taken it, because, of all that there were to be had at Balbec, it was the only one that provided him with a really big studio.

It was also with averted eyes that I crossed the garden, which had a lawn—in miniature, like any little suburban villa round Paris—a statuette of an amorous gardener, glass balls in which one saw one's distorted reflexion, beds of begonias and a little arbour, beneath which rocking chairs were drawn up round an iron table. But after all these preliminaries hallmarked with philistine ugliness, I took no notice of the chocolate mouldings on the plinths once I was in the studio; I felt perfectly happy, for, with the help of all the sketches and studies that surrounded me, I foresaw the possibility of raising myself to a poetical understanding, rich in delights, of many forms which I had not, hitherto, isolated from the general spectacle of reality. And Elstir's studio appeared to me as the laboratory of a sort of new creation of the world in which, from the chaos that is all the things we see, he had extracted, by painting them on various rectangles of canvas that were hung everywhere about the room, here a wave of the sea crushing angrily on the sand its lilac foam, there a young man in a suit of white linen, leaning upon the rail of a vessel. His jacket and the spattering wave had acquired fresh dignity from the fact that they continued to exist, even although they were deprived of those qualities in which they might be supposed to consist, the wave being no longer able to splash nor the jacket to clothe anyone.

At the moment at which I entered, the creator was just finishing, with the brush which he had in his hand, the form of the sun at its setting.

The shutters were closed almost everywhere round the studio, which was fairly cool and, except in one place where daylight laid against the wall its brilliant but fleeting decoration, dark; there was open only one little rectangular window embowered in honeysuckle, which, over a strip of garden, gave on an avenue; so that the atmosphere of the greater part of the studio was dusky, transparent and compact in the mass, but liquid and sparkling at the rifts where the golden clasp of sunlight banded it, like a lump of rock crystal of which one surface, already cut and polished, here and there, gleams like a mirror with iridescent rays. While Elstir, at my request, went on painting, I wandered about in the half-light, stopping to examine first one picture, then another.

Most of those that covered the walls were not what I should chiefly have liked to see of his work, paintings in what an English art journal which lay about on the reading-room table in the Grand Hotel called his first and second manners, the mythological manner and the manner in which he shewed signs of Japanese influence, both admirably exemplified, the article said, in the collection of Mme. de Guermantes. Naturally enough, what he had in his studio were almost all seascapes done here, at Balbec. But I was able to discern from these that the charm of each of them lay in a sort of metamorphosis of the things represented in it, analogous to what in poetry we call metaphor, and that, if God the Father had created things by naming them, it was by taking away their names or giving them other names that Elstir created them anew. The names which denote things correspond invariably to an intellectual notion, alien to our true impressions, and compelling us to eliminate from them everything that is not in keeping with itself.

Sometimes in my window in the hotel at Balbec, in the morning when Françoise undid the fastenings of the curtains that shut out the light, in the evening when I was waiting until it should be time to go out with Saint-Loup, I had been led by some effect of sunlight to mistake what was only a darker stretch of sea for a distant coastline, or to gaze at a belt of liquid azure without knowing whether it belonged to sea or sky. But presently my reason would re-establish between the elements that distinction which in my first impression I had overlooked. In the same way I used, in Paris, in my bedroom, to hear a dispute, almost a riot, in the street below, until I had referred back to its cause—a carriage for instance that was rattling towards me—this noise, from which I now eliminated the shrill and discordant vociferations which my ear had really heard but which my reason knew that wheels did not produce. But the rare moments in which we see nature as she is, with poetic vision, it was from those that Elstir's work was taken. One of his metaphors that occurred most commonly in the seascapes which he had round him was precisely that which, comparing land with sea, suppressed every line of demarcation between them. It was this comparison, tacitly and untiringly repeated on a single canvas, which gave it that multiform and powerful unity, the cause (not always clearly perceived by themselves) of the enthusiasm which Elstir's work aroused in certain collectors.

It was, for instance, for a metaphor of this sort—in a picture of the harbour of Carquethuit, a picture which he had finished a few days earlier and at which I now stood gazing my fill—that Elstir had prepared the mind of the spectator by employing, for the little town, only marine terms, and urban terms for the sea. Whether its houses concealed a part of the harbour, a dry dock, or perhaps the sea itself came cranking in among the land, as constantly happened on the Balbec coast, on the other side of the promontory on which the town was built the roofs were overtopped (as it had been by mill-chimneys or church-steeples) by masts which had the effect of making the vessels to which they belonged appear town-bred, built on land, an impression which was strengthened by the sight of other boats, moored along the jetty but in such serried ranks that you could see men talking across from one deck to another without being able to distinguish the dividing line, the chink of water between them, so that this fishing fleet seemed less to belong to the water than, for instance, the churches of Criquebec which, in the far distance, surrounded by water on every side because you saw them without seeing the town, in a powdery haze of sunlight and crumbling waves, seemed to be emerging from the waters, blown in alabaster or in sea-foam, and, enclosed in the band of a particoloured rainbow, to form an unreal, a mystical picture. On the beach in the foreground the painter had arranged that the eye should discover no fixed boundary, no absolute line of demarcation between earth and ocean. The men who were pushing down their boats into the sea were running as much through the waves as along the sand, which, being wet, reflected their hulls as if they were already in the water. The sea itself did not come up in an even line but followed the irregularities of the shore, which the perspective of the picture increased still further, so that a ship actually at sea, half-hidden by the projecting works of the arsenal, seemed to be sailing across the middle of the town; women who were gathering shrimps among the rocks had the appearance, because they were surrounded by water and because of the depression which, after the ringlike barrier of rocks, brought the beach (on the side nearest the land) down to sea-level, of being in a marine grotto overhung by ships and waves, open yet unharmed in the path of a miraculously averted tide. If the whole picture gave this impression of harbours in which the sea entered into the land, in which the land was already subaqueous and the population amphibian, the strength of the marine element was everywhere apparent; and round about the rocks, at the mouth of the harbour, where the sea was rough, you felt from the muscular efforts of the fishermen and the obliquity of the boats leaning over at an acute angle, compared with the calm erectness of the warehouse on the harbour, the church, the houses of the town to which some of the figures were returning while others were coming out to fish, that they were riding bareback on the water, as it might be a swift and fiery animal whose rearing, but for their skill, must have unseated them. A party of holiday makers were putting gaily out to sea in a boat that tossed like a jaunting-car on a rough road; their boatman, blithe but attentive, also, to what he was doing, trimmed the bellying sail, every one kept in his place, so that the weight should not be all on one side of the boat, which might capsize, and so they went racing over sunlit fields into shadowy places, dashing down into the troughs of waves. It was a fine morning in spite of the recent storm. Indeed, one could still feel the powerful activities that must first be neutralized in order to attain the easy balance of the boats that lay motionless, enjoying sunshine and breeze, in parts where the sea was so calm that its reflexions had almost more solidity and reality than the floating hulls, vaporised by an effect of the sunlight, parts which the perspective of the picture dovetailed in among others. Or rather you would not have called them other parts of the sea. For between those parts there was as much difference as there was between one of them and the church rising from the water, or the ships behind the town. Your reason then set to work and made a single element of what was here black beneath a gathering storm, a little farther all of one colour with the sky and as brightly burnished, and elsewhere so bleached by sunshine, haze and foam, so compact, so terrestrial, so circumscribed with houses that you thought of some white stone causeway or of a field of snow, up the surface of which it was quite frightening to see a ship go climbing high and dry, as a carriage climbs dripping from a ford, but which a moment later, when you saw on the raised and broken surface of the solid plain boats drunkenly heaving, you understood, identical in all these different aspects, to be still the sea.

Although we are justified in saying that there can be no progress, no discovery in art, but only in the sciences, and that the artist who begins afresh upon his own account an individual effort cannot be either helped or hindered by the efforts of all the others, we must nevertheless admit that, in so far as art brings into prominence certain laws, once an industry has taken those laws and vulgarised them, the art that was first in the field loses, in retrospect, a little of its originality. Since Elstir began to paint, we have grown familiar with what are called 'admirable' photographs of scenery and towns. If we press for a definition of what their admirers mean by the epithet, we shall find that it is generally applied to some unusual picture of a familiar object, a picture different from those that we are accustomed to see, unusual and yet true to nature, and for that reason doubly impressive to us because it startles us, makes us emerge from our habits and at the same time brings us back to ourselves by recalling to us an earlier impression. For instance, one of these 'magnificent' photographs will illustrate a law of perspective, will shew us some cathedral which we are accustomed to see in the middle of a town, taken instead from a selected point of view from which it will appear to be thirty times the height of the houses and to be thrusting a spur out from the bank of the river, from which it is actually a long way off. Now the effort made by Elstir to reproduce things not as he knew them to be but according to the optical illusions of which our first sight of them is composed, had led him exactly to this point; he gave special emphasis to certain of these laws of perspective, which were thus all the more striking, since his art had been their first interpreter. A river, because of the windings of its course, a bay because of the apparent contact of the cliffs on either side of it, would look as though there had been hollowed out in the heart of the plain or of the mountains a lake absolutely landlocked on every side. In a picture of a view from Balbec painted upon a scorching day in summer an inlet of the sea appeared to be enclosed in walls of pink granite, not to be the sea, which began farther out. The continuity of the ocean was suggested only by the gulls which, wheeling over what, when one looked at the picture, seemed to be solid rock, were as a matter of fact inhaling the moist vapour of the shifting tide. Other laws were discernible in the same canvas, as, at the foot of immense cliffs, the lilliputian grace of white sails on the blue mirror on whose surface they looked like butterflies asleep, and certain contrasts between the depth of the shadows and the pallidity of the light. This play of light and shade, which also photography has rendered commonplace, had interested Elstir so much that at one time he had painted what were almost mirages, in which a castle crowned with a tower appeared as a perfect circle of castle prolonged by a tower at its summit, and at its foot by an inverted tower, whether because the exceptional purity of the atmosphere on a fine day gave the shadow reflected in the water the hardness and brightness of the stone, or because the morning mists rendered the stone as vaporous as the shadow. And similarly, beyond the sea, behind a line of woods, began another sea roseate with the light of the setting sun, which was, in fact, the sky. The light, as it were precipitating new solids, thrust back the hull of the boat on which it fell behind the other hull that was still in shadow, and rearranged like the steps of a crystal staircase what was materially a plane surface, but was broken up by the play of light and shade upon the morning sea. A river running beneath the bridges of a town was caught from a certain point of view so that it appeared entirely dislocated, now broadened into a lake, now narrowed into a rivulet, broken elsewhere by the interruption of a hill crowned with trees among which the burgher would repair at evening to taste the refreshing breeze; and the rhythm of this disintegrated town was assured only by the inflexible uprightness of the steeples which did not rise but rather, following the plumb line of the pendulum marking its cadence as in a triumphal march, seemed to hold in suspense beneath them all the confused mass of houses that rose vaguely in the mist along the banks of the crushed, disjointed stream. And (since Elstir's earliest work belonged to the time in which a painter would make his landscape attractive by inserting a human figure), on the cliff's edge or among the mountains, the road, that half human part of nature, underwent, like river or ocean, the eclipses of perspective. And whether a sheer wall of mountain, or the mist blown from a torrent, or the sea prevented the eye from following the continuity of the path, visible to the traveller but not to us, the little human personage in old-fashioned attire seemed often to be stopped short on the edge of an abyss, the path which he had been following ending there, while, a thousand feet above him in those pine-forests, it was with a melting eye and comforted heart that we saw reappear the threadlike whiteness of its dusty surface, hospitable to the wayfaring foot, whereas from us the side of the mountain had hidden, where it turned to avoid waterfall or gully, the intervening bends.

The effort made by Elstir to strip himself, when face to face with reality, of every intellectual concept, was all the more admirable in that this man who, before sitting down to paint, made himself deliberately ignorant, forgot, in his honesty of purpose, everything that he knew, since what one knows ceases to exist by itself, had in reality an exceptionally cultivated mind. When I confessed to him the disappointment that I had felt upon seeing the porch at Balbec: "What!" he had exclaimed, "you were disappointed by the porch! Why, it's the finest illustrated Bible that the people have ever had. That Virgin, and all the bas-reliefs telling the story of her life, they are the most loving, the most inspired expression of that endless poem of adoration and praise in which the middle ages extolled the glory of the Madonna. If you only knew, side by side with the most scrupulous accuracy in rendering the sacred text, what exquisite ideas the old carver had, what profound thoughts, what delicious poetry!

"A wonderful idea, that great sheet in which the angels are carrying the body of the Virgin, too sacred for them to venture to touch it with their hands"; (I mentioned to him that this theme had been treated also at Saint-André-des-Champs; he had seen photographs of the porch there, and agreed, but pointed out that the bustling activity of those little peasant figures, all hurrying at once towards the Virgin, was not the same thing as the gravity of those two great angels, almost Italian, so springing, so gentle) "the angel who is carrying the Virgin's soul, to reunite it with her body; in the meeting of the Virgin with Elizabeth, Elizabeth's gesture when she touches the Virgin's Womb and marvels to feel that it is great with child; and the bandaged arm of the midwife who had refused, unless she touched, to believe the Immaculate Conception; and the linen cloth thrown by the Virgin to Saint Thomas to give him a proof of the Resurrection; that veil, too, which the Virgin tears from her own bosom to cover the nakedness of her Son, from Whose Side the Church receives in a chalice the Wine of the Sacrament, while, on His other side the Synagogue, whose kingdom is at an end, has its eyes bandaged, holds a half-broken sceptre and lets fall, with the crown that is slipping from its head, the tables of the old law; and the husband who, on the Day of Judgment, as he helps his young wife to rise from her grave, lays her hand against his own heart to reassure her, to prove to her that it is indeed beating, is that such a trumpery idea, do you think, so stale and commonplace? And the angel who is taking away the sun and the moon, henceforth useless, since it is written that the Light of the Cross shall be seven times brighter than the light of the firmament; and the one who is dipping his hand in the water of the Child's bath, to see whether it is warm enough; and the one emerging from the clouds to place the crown upon the Virgin's brow, and all the angels who are leaning from the vault of heaven, between the balusters of the New Jerusalem, and throwing up their arms with terror or joy at the sight of the torments of the wicked or the bliss of the elect! For it is all the circles of heaven, a whole gigantic poem full of theology and symbolism that you have before you there. It is fantastic, mad, divine, a thousand times better than anything you will see in Italy, where for that matter this very tympanum has been carefully copied by sculptors with far less genius. There never was a time when genius was universal; that is all nonsense; it would be going beyond the age of gold. The fellow who carved that front, you may make up your mind that he was every bit as great, that he had just as profound ideas as the men you admire most at the present day. I could shew you what I mean if we went there together. There are certain passages from the Office of the Assumption which have been rendered with a subtilty of expression that Redon himself has never equalled."

This vast celestial vision of which he spoke to me, this gigantic theological poem which, I understood, had been inscribed there in stone, yet when my eyes, big with desire, had opened to gaze upon the front of Balbec church, it was not these things that I had seen. I spoke to him of those great statues of saints, which, mounted on scaffolds, formed a sort of avenue on either side.

"It starts from the mists of antiquity to end in Jesus Christ," he explained. "You see on one side His ancestors after the spirit, on the other the Kings of Judah, His ancestors after the flesh. All the ages are there. And if you had looked more closely at what you took for scaffolds you would have been able to give names to the figures standing on them. At the feet of Moses you would have recognised the calf of gold, at Abraham's the ram and at Joseph's the demon counselling Potiphar's wife."

I told him also that I had gone there expecting to find an almost Persian building, and that this had doubtless been one of the chief factors in my disappointment. "Indeed, no," he assured me, "it is perfectly true. Some parts of it are quite oriental; one of the capitals reproduces so exactly a Persian subject that you cannot account for it by the persistence of Oriental traditions. The carver must have copied some casket brought from the East by explorers." And he did indeed shew me, later on, the photograph of a capital on which I saw dragons that were almost Chinese devouring one another, but at Balbec this little piece of carving had passed unnoticed by me in the general effect of the building which did not conform to the pattern traced in my mind by the words, 'an almost Persian church.'

The intellectual pleasures which I enjoyed in this studio did not in the least prevent me from feeling, although they enveloped us as it were in spite of ourselves, the warm polish, the sparkling gloom of the place itself and, through the little window framed in honeysuckle, in the avenue that was quite rustic, the resisting dryness of the sun-parched earth, screened only by the diaphanous gauze woven of distance and of a tree-cast shade.

Perhaps the unaccountable feeling of comfort which this summer day was giving me came like a tributary to swell the flood of joy that had surged in me at the sight of Elstir's *Carquethuit Harbour.*

I had supposed Elstir to be a modest man, but I realised my mistake on seeing his face cloud with melancholy when, in a little speech of thanks, I uttered the word 'fame.' Men who believe that their work will last—as was the case with Elstir—form the habit of placing that work in a period when they themselves will have crumbled into dust. And thus, by obliging them to reflect on their own extinction, the thought of fame saddens them because it is inseparable from the thought of death. I changed the conversation in the hope of driving away the cloud of ambitious melancholy with which unwittingly I had loaded Elstir's brow. "Some one advised me once," I began, thinking of the conversation we had had with Legrandin at Combray, as to which I was glad of an opportunity of learning Elstir's views, "not to visit Brittany, because it would not be wholesome for a mind with a natural tendency to dream." "Not at all;" he replied. "When the mind has a tendency to dream, it is a mistake to keep dreams away from it, to ration its dreams. So long as you distract your mind from its dreams, it will not know them for what they are; you will always be being taken in by the appearance of things, because you will not have grasped their true nature. If a little dreaming is dangerous, the cure for it is not to dream less but to dream more, to dream all the time. One must have a thorough understanding of one's dreams if one is not to be troubled by them; there is a way of separating one's dreams from one's life which so often produces good results that I ask myself whether one ought not, at all costs, to try it, simply as a preventive, just as certain surgeons make out that we ought, to avoid the risk of appendicitis later on, to have all our appendices taken out when we are children."

Elstir and I had meanwhile been walking about the studio, and had reached the window that looked across the garden on to a narrow avenue, a side-street that was almost a country lane. We had gone there to breathe the cooler air of the late afternoon. I supposed myself to be nowhere near the girls of the little band, and it was only by sacrificing for once the hope of seeing them that I had yielded to my grandmother's prayers and had gone to see Elstir. For where the thing is to be found that we are seeking we never know, and often we steadily, for a long time, avoid the place to which, for quite different reasons, everyone has been asking us to go. But we never suspect that we shall there see the very person of whom we are thinking. I looked out vaguely over the country road which, outside the studio, passed quite close to it but did not belong to Elstir. Suddenly there appeared on it, coming along it at a rapid pace, the young bicyclist of the little band, with, over her dark hair, her polo-cap pulled down towards her plump cheeks, her eyes merry and almost importunate; and on that auspicious path, miraculously filled with promise of delights, I saw her beneath the trees throw to Elstir the smiling greeting of a friend, a rainbow that bridged the gulf for me between our terraqueous world and regions which I had hitherto regarded as inaccessible. She even came up to give her hand to the painter, though without stopping, and I could see that she had a tiny beauty spot on her chin. "Do you know that girl, sir?" I asked Elstir, realising that he could if he chose make me known to her, could invite us both to the house. And this peaceful studio with its rural horizon was at once filled with a surfeit of delight such as a child might feel in a house where he was already happily playing when he learned that, in addition, out of that bounteousness which enables lovely things and noble hosts to increase their gifts beyond all measure, there was being prepared for him a sumptuous repast. Elstir told me that she was called Albertine Simonet, and gave me the names also of her friends, whom I described to him with sufficient accuracy for him to identify them almost without hesitation. I had, with regard to their social position, made a mistake, but not the mistake that I usually made at Balbec. I was always ready to take for princes the sons of shopkeepers when they appeared on horseback. This time I had placed in an interloping class the daughters of a set of respectable people, extremely rich, belonging to the world of industry and business. It was the class which, on first thoughts, interested me least, since it held for me neither the mystery of the lower orders nor that of a society such as the Guermantes frequented. And no doubt if an inherent quality, a rank which they could never forfeit, had not been conferred on them, in my dazzled eyes, by the glaring vacuity of the seaside life all round them, I should perhaps not have succeeded in resisting and overcoming the idea that they were the daughters of prosperous merchants. I could not help marvelling to see how the French middle class was a wonderful studio full of sculpture of the noblest and most varied kind. What unimagined types, what richness of invention in the character of their faces, what firmness, what freshness, what simplicity in their features. The shrewd old money-changers from whose loins these Dianas and these nymphs had sprung seemed to me to have been the greatest of statuaries. Before I had time to register the social metamorphosis of these girls—so are these discoveries of a mistake, these modifications of the notion one has of a person instantaneous as a chemical combination—there was already installed behind their faces, so street-arab in type that I had taken them for the mistresses of racing bicyclists, of boxing champions, the idea that they might easily be connected with the family of some lawyer or other whom we knew. I was barely conscious of what was meant by Albertine Simonet; she had certainly no conception of what she was one day to mean to me. Even the name, Simonet, which I had already heard spoken on the beach, if I had been asked to write it down I should have spelt with a double 'n,' never dreaming of the importance which this family attached to there being but one in their name. In proportion as we descend the social scale our snobbishness fastens on to mere nothings which are perhaps no more null than the distinctions observed by the aristocracy, but, being more obscure, more peculiar to the individual, take us more by surprise. Possibly there had been Simonnets who had done badly in business, or something worse still even. The fact remains that the Simonets never failed, it appeared, to be annoyed if anyone doubled their 'n.' They wore the air of being the only Simonets in the world with one 'n' instead of two, and were as proud of it, perhaps, as the Montmorency family were of being the premier barons of

France. I asked Elstir whether these girls lived at Balbec; yes, he told me, some of them at any rate. The villa in which one of them lived was at that very spot, right at the end of the beach, where the cliffs of Canapville began. As this girl was a great friend of Albertine Simonet, this was another reason for me to believe that it was indeed the latter whom I had met that day when I was with my grandmother. There were of course so many of those little streets running down to the beach, and all at the same angle, that I could not have pointed out exactly which of them it had been. One would like always to remember a thing accurately, but at the time one's vision was clouded. And yet that Albertine and the girl whom I had seen going to her friend's house were one and the same person was a practical certainty. In spite of which, whereas the countless images that have since been furnished me by the dark young golfer, however different they may have been from one another, have overlaid one another (because I now know that they all belong to her), and if I retrace the thread of my memories I can, under cover of that identity, and as though along a tunnelled passage, pass through all those images in turn without losing my consciousness of the same person behind them all, if, on the other hand, I wish to revert to the girl whom I passed that day when I was with my grandmother, I must escape first into freer air. I am convinced that it is Albertine whom I find there, the same girl as her who would often stop dead among her moving comrades, in her walk along the foreground of the sea; but all those more recent images remain separate from that earlier one because I am unable to confer on her retrospectively an identity which she had not for me at the moment in which she caught my eye; whatever assurance I may derive from the law of probabilities, that girl with plump cheeks who stared at me so boldly from the angle of the little street and the beach, and by whom I believe that I might have been loved, I have never, in the strict sense of the words, seen again.

My hesitation between the different girls of the little band, all of whom retained something of the collective charm which had at first disturbed me, combined with the reasons already given to allow me later on, even at the time of my greater—my second—passion for Albertine, a sort of intermittent and very brief liberty to abstain from loving her. From having strayed among all her friends before it finally concentrated itself on her, my love kept, now and then, between itself and the image of Albertine a certain 'play' of light and shade which enabled it, like a badly fitted lamp, to flit over the surface of each of the others before settling its focus upon her; the connexion between the pain which I felt in my heart and the memory of Albertine did not seem to me necessary; I might perhaps have managed to co-ordinate it with the image of another person. Which enabled me, in a momentary flash, to banish reality altogether, not only external reality, as in my love for Gilberte (which I had recognised to be an internal state in which I drew from myself alone the particular quality, the special character of the person whom I loved, everything that rendered her indispensable to my happiness), but even the other reality, internal and purely subjective.

"Not a day passes but one or the other of them comes by here, and looks in for a minute or two," Elstir told me, plunging me in despair when I thought that if I had gone to see him at once, when my grandmother had begged me to do so, I should, in all probability, long since have made Albertine's acquaintance.

She had passed on; from the studio she was no longer in sight. I supposed that she had gone to join her friends on the 'front.' Could I have appeared there suddenly with Elstir, I should have got to know them all. I thought of endless pretexts for inducing him to take a turn with me on the beach. I had no longer the same peace of mind as before the apparition of the girl in the frame of the little window; so charming until then in its fringe of honeysuckle, and now so drearily empty. Elstir caused me a joy that was tormenting also when he said that he would go a little way with me, but that he must first finish the piece of work on which he was engaged. It was a flower study but not one of any of the flowers, portraits of which I would rather have commissioned him to paint than the portrait of a person, so that I might learn from the revelation of his genius what I had so often sought in vain from the flowers themselves—hawthorn white and pink, cornflowers, apple-blossom. Elstir as he worked talked botany to me, but I scarcely listened; he was no longer sufficient in himself, he was now only the necessary intermediary between these girls and me; the distinction which, only a few moments ago, his talent had still given him in my eyes was now worthless save in so far as it might confer a little on me also in the eyes of the little band to whom I should be presented by him.

I paced up and down the room, impatient for him to finish what he was doing; I picked up and examined various sketches, any number of which were stacked against the walls. In this way I happened to bring to light a water-colour which evidently belonged to a much earlier period in Elstir's life, and gave me that particular kind of enchantment which is diffused by works of art not only deliciously executed but representing a subject so singular and so seductive that it is to it that we attribute a great deal of their charm, as if the charm were something that the painter had merely to uncover, to observe, realised already in a material form by nature, and to reproduce in art. That such objects can exist, beautiful quite apart from the painter's interpretation of them, satisfies a sort of innate materialism in us, against which our reason contends and acts as a counterpoise to the abstractions of aesthetics. It was—this water-colour—the portrait of a young woman, by no means beautiful but of a curious type, in a close-fitting mob-cap not unlike a 'billy-cock' hat, trimmed with a ribbon of cherry-coloured silk; in one of her mittened hands was a lighted cigarette, while the other held, level with her knee, a sort of broad-brimmed garden hat, nothing more than a fire screen of plaited straw to keep off the sun. On a table by her side, a tall vase filled with pink carnations. Often (and it was the case here) the singularity of such works is due principally to their having been executed in special conditions for which we do not at first sight make proper allowance, if, for instance, the strange attire of a feminine model is her costume for a masked ball, or conversely the scarlet cloak which an elderly man looks as though he had put on to humour some whim in the painter is his gown as a professor or alderman or his cardinal's cassock. The ambiguous character of the person whose portrait now confronted me arose, without my understanding it, from the fact that she was a young actress of an earlier generation half dressed for a part. But the cap or hat, beneath which the hair stuck out but was cut short, the velvet coat opening without lapels over a white shirt-front, made me hesitate as to the period of the clothes and the sex of the model, so that I did not know what it was exactly that I was holding before my eyes, unless simply the brightest coloured of these scraps of painting. And the pleasure which it afforded me was disturbed only by the fear that Elstir, by delaying further, would make me miss the girls, for the sun was now declining and hung low in the little window. Nothing in this water-colour was merely stated there as a fact and painted because of its utility to the composition, the costume because the young woman must be wearing something, the vase to hold the flowers. The glass of the vase, cherished for its own sake, seemed to be holding the water in which the stems of the carnations were dipped in something as limpid, almost as liquid as itself; the woman's dress encompassed her in a manner that had an independent, a brotherly charm, and, if the works of man can compete in charm with the wonders of nature, as delicate, as pleasing to the touch of the eye, as freshly painted as the fur of a cat, the petals of a flower, the feathers of a dove. The whiteness of the shirt-front, fine as driven rain, with its gay pleats gathered into little bells like lilies of the valley, was starred with bright gleams of light from the room, as sharply edged and as finely shaded as though they had been posies of flowers stitched on the woven lawn. And the velvet of the coat, brilliant with a milky sheen, had here and there a roughness, a scoring, a shagginess on its surface which made one think of the crumpled brightness of the carnations in the vase. But above all one felt that Elstir, sublimely indifferent to whatever immoral suggestion there might be in this disguise of a young actress for whom the talent with which she would play her part on the stage was doubtless of less importance than the irritant attraction which she would offer to the jaded or depraved senses of some of her audience, had on the contrary fastened upon those ambiguous points as on an aesthetic element which deserved to be brought into prominence, and which he had done everything in his power to emphasise. Along the lines of the face, the latent sex seemed to be on the point of confessing itself to be that of a somewhat boyish girl, then vanished and farther on reappeared with a suggestion rather of an effeminate youth, vicious and pensive, then fled once more to remain uncapturable. The dreamy sadness in the expression of her eyes, by the mere fact of its contrast with the accessories belonging to the world of love-making and play-acting, was not the least disturbing element in the picture. One imagined moreover that it must be feigned, and that the young person who seemed ready to submit to caresses in this provoking costume had probably thought it effective to enhance the provocation with this romantic expression of a secret longing, an unspoken grief. At the foot of the picture was inscribed "*Miss Sacripant:* October, 1872." I could not contain my admiration. "Oh, it's nothing, only a rough sketch I did when I was young; it was a costume for a variety show. It's all ages ago now." "And what has become of the model?" A bewilderment provoked by my words preceded on Elstir's face the indifferent, absent-minded air which, a moment later, he displayed there. "Quick, give it to me!" he cried, "I hear Madame Elstir coming, and, though, I assure you, the young person in the billy-cock hat never played any part in my life, still there's no point in my wife's coming in and finding it staring her in the face. I have kept it only as an amusing side-light on the theatre of those days." And, before putting it away behind the pile, Elstir, who perhaps had not set eyes on the sketch for years, gave it his careful scrutiny. "I must keep just the head," he murmured, "the lower part is really too shockingly bad, the hands are a beginner's work." I was miserable at the arrival of Mme. Elstir, who could only delay us still further. The window sill was already aglow. Our excursion would be a pure waste of time. There was no longer the slightest chance of our seeing the girls, consequently it mattered now not at all how soon Mme. Elstir left us or how long she stayed. Not that she did stay for any length of time. I found her most tedious; she might have been beautiful, once, at twenty, driving an ox in the Roman Campagna, but her dark hair was streaked with grey and she was common without being simple, because she believed that a pompous manner and majestic attitudes were required by her statuesque beauty, which, however, advancing age had robbed of all its charm. She was dressed with the utmost simplicity. And it was touching, but at the same time surprising to hear Elstir, whenever he opened his mouth, and with a respectful gentleness, as if merely uttering the words moved him to tenderness and veneration, repeat: "My beautiful Gabrielle!" Later on, when I had become familiar with Elstir's mythological paintings, Mme. Elstir acquired beauty in my eyes also. I understood then that to a certain ideal type illustrated by certain lines, certain arabesques which reappeared incessantly throughout his work, to a certain canon of art he had attributed a character that was almost divine, since the whole of his time, all the mental effort of which he was capable, in a word his whole life he had consecrated to the task of distinguishing those lines as clearly and of reproducing them as faithfully as possible. What such an ideal inspired in Elstir was indeed a cult so solemn, so exacting that it never allowed him to be satisfied with what he had achieved; was the most intimate part of himself, and so he had never been able to look at it from a detached standpoint, to extract emotion from it, until the day on which he encountered it realised outside, apart from himself, in the body of a woman, the body of her who in due course became Mme. Elstir and in whom he had been able (as one is able only with something that is not oneself) to find it meritorious, moving, god-like. How comforting, moreover, to let his lips rest upon that Beauty which hitherto he had been obliged with so great labour to extract from within himself, whereas now, mysteriously incarnate, it offered itself to him in a series of communions, filled with saving grace. Elstir at this period was no longer in that early youth in which we look only to the power of our own mind for the realisation of our ideal. He was nearing the age at which we count on bodily satisfactions to stimulate the forces of the brain, at which the exhaustion of the brain inclining us to materialism and the diminution of our activity to the possibility of influences passively received, begin to make us admit that there may indeed be certain bodies, certain callings, certain rhythms that are privileged, realising so naturally our ideal that even without genius, merely by copying the movement of a shoulder, the tension of a throat, we can achieve a masterpiece, it is the age at which we like to caress Beauty with our eyes objectively, outside ourselves, to have it near us, in a tapestry, in a lovely sketch by Titian picked up in a second-hand shop, in a mistress as lovely as Titian's sketch. When I understood this I could no longer look without pleasure at Mme. Elstir, and her body began to lose its heaviness, for I filled it with an idea, the idea that she was an immaterial creature, a portrait by Elstir. She was one for me, and for him also I dare say. The facts of life have no meaning for the artist, they are to him merely an opportunity for exposing the naked blaze of his genius. One feels unmistakably, when one sees side by side ten portraits of different people painted by Elstir, that they are all, first and foremost, Elstirs. Only, after this rising tide of genius, which sweeps over and submerges a man's life, when the brain begins to tire, gradually the balance is upset and, like a river that resumes its course after the counterflow of a spring tide, it is life that once more takes the upper hand. While the first period lasted, the artist has gradually evolved the law, the formula of his unconscious gift. He knows what situations, should he be a novelist—if a painter, what scenes—furnish him with the subject matter, which may be anything in the world but, whatever it is, is essential to his researches as a laboratory might be of a workshop. He knows that he has created his masterpieces out of effects of attenuated light, the action of remorse upon consciousness of guilt, out of women posed beneath trees or half-immersed in water, like statues. A day will come when, owing to the exhaustion of his brain, he will no longer have the strength, when provided with those materials which his genius was wont to use, to make the intellectual effort which alone can produce his work, and will yet continue to seek them out, happy when he finds himself in their presence, because of the spiritual pleasure, the allurement to work that they arouse in him; and, surrounding them besides with a kind of hedge of superstition as if they were superior to all things else, as if in them already dwelt a great part of the work of art which they might be said to carry within them ready made, he will confine himself to the company, to the adoration of his models. He will hold endless conversations with the repentant criminals whose remorse, whose regeneration formed, when he still wrote, the subject of his novels; he will buy a country house in a district where mists attenuate the light, he will spend long hours gazing at the limbs of bathing women; will collect sumptuous stuffs. And thus the beauty of life, a phase that has to some extent lost its meaning, a stage beyond the boundaries of art at which I had already seen Swann come to rest, was that also which, by a slackening of the creative ardour, idolatry of the forms which had inspired it, desire to avoid effort, must ultimately arrest an Elstir's progress.

At last he had applied the final brush-stroke to his flowers; I sacrificed a minute to look at them; I acquired no merit by the act, for I knew that there was no chance now of our finding the girls on the beach; and yet, had I believed them to be still there, and that these wasted moments would make me miss them, I should have stopped to look none the less, for I should have told myself that Elstir was more interested in his flowers than in my meeting with the girls. My grandmother's nature, a nature that was the exact counterpart of my complete egoism, was nevertheless reflected in certain aspects of my own. In circumstances in which someone to whom I was indifferent, for whom I had always made a show of affection or respect, ran the risk merely of some unpleasantness whereas I was in real danger, I could not have done otherwise than commiserate with him on his annoyance as though it had been something important, and treat my own danger as nothing, because I would feel that these were the proportions in which he must see things. To be quite accurate, I would go even further, and not only not complain of the danger in which I myself stood but go half-way to meet it, and with that which involved other people try, on the contrary, were I to increase the risk of my being caught myself, to avert it from them. The reasons for this are several, none of which does me the slightest credit. One is that if, while only my reason was employed, I have always believed in self-preservation, whenever in the course of my existence I have found myself obsessed by moral anxieties, or merely by nervous scruples, so puerile often that I dare not enumerate them here, if an unforeseen circumstance then arose, involving for me the risk of being killed, this new preoccupation was so trivial in comparison with the others that I welcomed it with a sense of relief, almost of hilarity. Thus I find myself, albeit the least courageous of men, to have known that feeling which has always seemed to me, in my reasoning moods, so foreign to my nature, so inconceivable, the intoxication of danger. But even although I were, when any, even a deadly peril threatened me, passing through an entirely calm and happy phase, I could not, were I with another person, refrain from sheltering him behind me and choosing for myself the post of danger. When a sufficient store of experience had taught me that I invariably acted, and enjoyed acting, thus, I discovered—and was deeply ashamed by the discovery—that it was because, in contradiction of what I had always believed and asserted, I was extremely sensitive to the opinions of others. Not that this kind of unconfessed self-esteem is in any sense vanity or conceit. For what might satisfy one or other of those failings would give me no pleasure, and I have always refrained from indulging them. But with the people in whose company I have succeeded in concealing most effectively the slight advantages a knowledge of which might have given them a less derogatory idea of myself, I have never been able to deny myself the pleasure of shewing them that I take more trouble to avert the risk of death from their path than from my own. As my motive is then self-esteem and not valour, I find it quite natural that in any crisis they should act differently. I am far from blaming them for it, as I should perhaps if I had been moved by a sense of duty, a duty which would seem to me, in that case, to be as incumbent upon them as upon myself. On the contrary, I feel that it is eminently sensible of them to safeguard their lives, though at the same time I cannot prevent my own safety from receding into the background, which is particularly silly and culpable of me since I have come to realise that the lives of many of the people in front of whom I plant myself when a bomb bursts are more valueless even than my own. However, on the day of this first visit to Elstir, the time was still distant at which I was to become conscious of this difference in value, and there was no question of danger, but simply—a harbinger this of that pernicious self-esteem—the question of my not appearing to attach to the pleasure which I so ardently desired more importance than to the work which the painter had still to finish. It was finished at last. And, once we were out of doors, I discovered that—so long were the days still at this season—it was not so late as I had supposed; we strolled down to the 'front.' What stratagems I employed to keep Elstir standing at the spot where I thought that the girls might still come past. Pointing to the cliffs that towered beside us, I kept on asking him to tell me about them, so as to make him forget the time and stay there a little longer. I felt that we had a better chance of waylaying the little band if we moved towards the end of the beach. "I should like to look at those cliffs with you from a little nearer," I said to him, having noticed that one of the girls was in the habit of going in that direction. "And as we go, do tell me about Carquethuit. I should so like to see Carquethuit," I went on, without thinking that the so novel character which manifested itself with such force in Elstir's *Carquethuit Harbour*, might belong perhaps rather to the painter's vision than to any special quality in the place itself. "Since I've seen your picture, I think that is where I should most like to go, there and to the Pointe du Raz, but of course that would be quite a journey from here." "Yes, and besides, even if it weren't nearer, I should advise you perhaps all the same to visit Carquethuit," he replied. "The Pointe du Raz is magnificent, but after all it is simply the high cliff of Normandy or Brittany which you know already. Carquethuit is quite different, with those rocks bursting from a level shore. I know nothing in France like it, it reminds me rather of what one sees in some parts of Florida. It is most interesting, and for that matter extremely wild too. It is between Clitourps and Nehomme; you know how desolate those parts are; the sweep of the coast-line is delicious. Here, the coast-line is like anywhere else; but along there I can't tell you what charm it has, what softness."

Night was falling; it was time to be turning homewards; I was escorting Elstir in the direction of his villa when suddenly, as it were Mephistopheles springing up before Faust, there appeared at the end of the avenue—like simply an objectification, unreal, diabolical, of the temperament diametrically opposed to my own, of the semi-barbarous and cruel vitality of which I, in my weakness, my excess of tortured sensibility and intellectuality was so destitute—a few spots of the essence impossible to mistake for anything else in the world, a few spores of the zoophytic band of girls, who wore an air of not having seen me but were unquestionably, for all that, proceeding as they advanced to pass judgment on me in their ironic vein. Feeling that a collision between them and us was now inevitable, and that Elstir would be certain to call me, I turned my back, like a bather preparing to meet the shock of a wave; I stopped dead and, leaving my eminent companion to pursue his way, remained where I was, stooping, as if I had suddenly become engrossed in it, towards the window of the curiosity shop which we happened to be passing at the moment. I was not sorry to give the appearance of being able to think of something other than these girls, and I was already dimly aware that when Elstir did call me up to introduce me to them I should wear that sort of challenging expression which betokens not surprise but the wish to appear as though one were surprised—so far is every one of us a bad actor, or everyone else a good thought-reader;—that I should even go so far as to point a finger to my breast, as who should ask "It is me, really, that you want?" and then run to join him, my head lowered in compliance and docility and my face coldly masking my annoyance at being torn from the study of old pottery in order to be introduced to people whom I had no wish to know. Meanwhile I explored the window and waited for the moment in which my name, shouted by Elstir, would come to strike me like an expected and innocuous bullet. The certainty of being introduced to these girls had had the result of making me not only feign complete indifference to them, but actually to feel it. Inevitable from this point, the pleasure of knowing them began at once to shrink, became less to me than the pleasure of talking to Saint-Loup, of dining with my grandmother, of making, in the neighbourhood of Balbec, excursions which I would regret the probability, in consequence of my having to associate with people who could scarcely be much interested in old buildings, of my being forced to abandon. Moreover, what diminished the pleasure which I was about to feel was not merely the imminence but the incoherence of its realisation. Laws as precise as those of hydrostatics maintain the relative position of the images which we form in a fixed order, which the coming event at once upsets. Elstir was just about to call me. This was not at all the fashion in which I had so often, on the beach, in my bedroom, imagined myself making these girls' acquaintance. What was about to happen was a different event, for which I was not prepared. I recognised neither my desire nor its object; I regretted almost that I had come out with Elstir. But, above all, the shrinking of the pleasure that I expected to feel was due to the certainty that nothing, now, could take that pleasure from me. And it resumed, as though by some latent elasticity in itself, its whole extent when it ceased to be subjected to the pressure of that certainty, at the moment when, having decided to turn my head, I saw Elstir, standing where he had stopped a few feet away with the girls, bidding them good-bye. The face of the girl who stood nearest to him, round and plump and glittering with the light in her eyes, reminded me of a cake on the top of which a place has been kept for a morsel of blue sky. Her eyes, even when fixed on an object, gave one the impression of motion, just as on days of high wind the air, although invisible, lets us perceive the speed with which it courses between us and the unchanging azure. For a moment her gaze intersected mine, like those travelling skies on stormy days which hurry after a rain-cloud that moves less rapidly than they, overtake, touch, cover, pass it and are gone; but they do not know one another, and are soon driven far apart. So our eyes were for a moment confronted, neither pair knowing what the celestial continent that lay before their gaze held of future blessing or disaster. Only at the moment when her gaze was directly coincident with mine, without slackening its movement it grew perceptibly duller. So on a starry night the wind-swept moon passes behind a cloud and veils her brightness for a moment, but soon will shine again. But Elstir had already said good-bye to the girls, and had never summoned me. They disappeared down a cross street; he came towards me. My whole plan was spoiled.

I have said that Albertine had not seemed to me that day to be the same as on previous days and that afterwards, each time I saw her, she was to appear different. But I felt at that moment that certain modifications in the appearance, the importance, the stature of a person may also be due to the variability of certain states of consciousness interposed between that person and us. One of those that play an important part in such transformations is belief; that evening my belief, then the vanishing of my belief, that I was about to know Albertine had, with a few seconds' interval only, rendered her almost insignificant, then infinitely precious in my sight; some years later, the belief, then the disappearance of the belief, that Albertine was faithful to me brought about similar changes.

Of course, long ago, at Combray, I had seen shrink or stretch, according to the time of day, according as I was entering one or the other of the two dominant moods that governed my sensibility in turn, my grief at not having my mother with me, as imperceptible all afternoon as is the moon's light when the sun is shining, and then, when night had come, reigning alone in my anxious heart in the place of recent memories now obliterated. But on that day at Balbec, when I saw that Elstir was leaving the girls and had not called me, I learned for the first time that the variations in the importance which a pleasure or a pain has in our eyes may depend not merely on this alternation of two moods, but on the displacement of invisible beliefs, such, for example, as make death seem to us of no account because they bathe it in a glow of unreality, and thus enable us to attach importance to our attending an evening party, which would lose much of its charm for if, on the announcement that we were sentenced to die by the guillotine, the belief that had bathed the party in its warm glow was instantly shattered; and this part that belief plays, it is true that something in me was aware of it; this was my will; but its knowledge is vain if the mind, the heart continue in ignorance; these last act in good faith when they believe that we are anxious to forsake a mistress to whom our will alone knows that we are still attached. This is because they are clouded by the belief that we shall see her again at any moment. But let this belief be shattered, let them suddenly become aware that this mistress is gone from us for ever, then the mind and heart, having lost their focus, are driven like mad things, the meanest pleasure becomes infinitely great.

Variance of a belief, annulment also of love, which, pre-existent and mobile, comes to rest at the image of any one woman simply because that woman will be almost impossible of attainment. Thenceforward we think not so much of the woman of whom we find difficult in forming an exact picture, as of the means of getting to know her. A whole series of agonies develops and is sufficient to fix our love definitely upon her who is its almost unknown object. Our love becomes immense; we never dream how small a place in it the real woman occupies. And if suddenly, as at the moment when I had seen Elstir stop to talk to the girls, we cease to be uneasy, to suffer pain, since it is this pain that is the whole of our love, it seems to us as though love had abruptly vanished at the moment when at length we grasp the prey to whose value we had not given enough thought before. What did I know of Albertine? One or two glimpses of a profile against the sea, less beautiful, assuredly, than those of Veronese's women whom I ought, had I been guided by purely aesthetic reasons, to have preferred to her. By what other reasons could I be guided, since, my anxiety having subsided, I could recapture only those mute profiles; I possessed nothing of her besides. Since my first sight of Albertine I had meditated upon her daily, a thousandfold, I had carried on with what I called by her name an interminable unspoken dialogue in which I made her question me, answer me, think and act, and in the infinite series of imaginary Albertines who followed one after the other in my fancy, hour after hour, the real Albertine, a glimpse caught on the beach, figured only at the head, just as the actress who creates a part, the star, appears, out of a long series of performances, in the few first alone. That Albertine was scarcely more than a silhouette, all that was superimposed being of my own growth, so far when we are in love does the contribution that we ourself make outweigh—even if we consider quantity only—those that come to us from the beloved object. And the same is true of love that is given its full effect. There are loves that manage not only to be formed but to subsist around a very little core—even among those whose prayer has been answered after the flesh. An old drawing-master who had taught my grandmother had been presented by some obscure mistress with a daughter. The mother died shortly after the birth of her child, and the drawing-master was so broken-hearted that he did not long survive her. In the last months of his life my grandmother and some of the Combray ladies, who had never liked to make any allusion in the drawing-master's presence to the woman, with whom, for that matter, he had not officially 'lived' and had had comparatively slight relations, took it into their heads to ensure the little girl's future by combining to purchase an annuity for her. It was my grandmother who suggested this; several of her friends made difficulties; after all was the child really such a very interesting case, was she even the child of her reputed father; with women like that, it was never safe to say. Finally, everything was settled. The child came to thank the ladies. She was plain, and so absurdly like the old drawing-master as to remove every shadow of doubt; her hair being the only nice thing about her, one of the ladies said to her father, who had come with her: "What pretty hair she has." And thinking that now, the woman who had sinned being dead and the old man only half alive, a discreet allusion to that past of which they had always pretended to know nothing could do no harm, my grandmother added: "It runs in families. Did her mother have pretty hair like that?" "I don't know," was the old man's quaint answer. "I never saw her except with a hat on."

But I must not keep Elstir waiting. I caught sight of myself in a glass. To add to the disaster of my not having been introduced to the girls, I noticed that my necktie was all crooked, my hat left long wisps of hair shewing, which did not become me; but it was a piece of luck, all the same, that they should have seen me, even thus attired, in Elstir's company and so could not forget me; also that I should have put on, that morning, at my grandmother's suggestion, my smart waistcoat, when I might so easily have been wearing one that was simply hideous, and be carrying my best stick. For while an event for which we are longing never happens quite in the way we have been expecting, failing the advantages on which we supposed that we might count, others present themselves for which we never hoped, and make up for our disappointment; and we have been so dreading the worst that in the end we are inclined to feel that, taking one thing with another, chance has, on the whole, been rather kind to us.

"I did so much want to know them," I said as I reached Elstir. "Then why did you stand a mile away?" These were his actual words, not that they expressed what was in his mind, since, if his desire had been to grant mine, to call me up to him would have been quite easy, but perhaps because he had heard phrases of this sort, in familiar use among common people when they are in the wrong, and because even great men are in certain respects much the same as common people, take their everyday excuses from the same common stock just as they get their daily bread from the same baker; or it may be that such expressions (which ought, one might almost say, to be read 'backwards,' since their literal interpretation is the opposite of the truth) are the instantaneous effect, the negative exposure of a reflex action. "They were in a hurry." It struck me that of course they must have stopped him from summoning a person who did not greatly attract them; otherwise he would not have failed, after all the questions that I had put to him about them, and the interest which he must have seen that I took in them, to call me. "We were speaking just now of Carquethuit," he began, as we walked towards his villa. "I have done a little sketch, in which you can see much better how the beach curves. The painting is not bad, but it is different. If you will allow me, just to cement our friendship, I would like to give you the sketch," he went on, for the people who refuse us the objects of our desire are always ready to offer us something else.

"I should very much like, if you have such a thing, a photograph of the little picture of Miss Sacripant. 'Sacripant'—that's not a real name, surely?" "It is the name of a character the sitter played in a stupid little musical comedy." "But, I assure you, sir, I have never set eyes on her; you look as though you thought that I knew her." Elstir was silent. "It isn't Mme. Swann, before she was married?" I hazarded, in one of those sudden fortuitous stumblings upon the truth, which are rare enough in all conscience, and yet give, in the long run, a certain cumulative support to the theory of presentiments, provided that one takes care to forget all the wrong guesses that would invalidate it. Elstir did not reply. The portrait was indeed that of Odette de Crécy. She had preferred not to keep it for many reasons, some of them obvious. But there were others less apparent. The portrait dated from before the point at which Odette, disciplining her features, had made of her face and figure that creation the broad outlines of which her hairdressers, her dressmakers, she herself—in her way of standing, of speaking, of smiling, of moving her hands, her eyes, of thinking—were to respect throughout the years to come. It required the vitiated tastes of a surfeited lover to make Swann prefer to all the countless photographs of the 'sealed pattern' Odette which was his charming wife the little photographs which he kept in his room and in which, beneath a straw hat trimmed with pansies, you saw a thin young woman, not even good-looking, with bunched-out hair and drawn features.

But apart from this, had the portrait been not anterior like Swann's favourite photograph, to the systematisation of Odette's features in a fresh type, majestic and charming, but subsequent to it, Elstir's vision would alone have sufficed to disorganise that type. Artistic genius in its reactions is like those extremely high temperatures which have the power to disintegrate combinations of atoms which they proceed to combine afresh in a diametrically opposite order, following another type. All that artificially harmonious whole into which a woman has succeeded in bringing her limbs and features, the persistence of which every day, before going out, she studies in her glass, changing the angle of her hat, smoothing her hair, exercising the sprightliness in her eyes, so as to ensure its continuity, that harmony the keen eye of the great painter instantly destroys, substituting for it a rearrangement of the woman's features such as will satisfy a certain pictorial ideal of femininity which he carries in his head. Similarly it often happens that, after a certain age, the eye of a great seeker after truth will find everywhere the elements necessary to establish those relations which alone are of interest to him. Like those craftsmen, those players who, instead of making a fuss and asking for what they cannot have, content themselves with the instrument that comes to their hand, the artist might say of anything, no matter what, that it would serve his purpose. Thus a cousin of the Princesse de Luxembourg, a beauty of the most queenly type, having succumbed to a form of art which was new at that time, had asked the leading painter of the naturalist school to do her portrait. At once the artist's eye had found what he sought everywhere in life. And on his canvas there appeared, in place of the proud lady, a street-boy, and behind him a vast, sloping, purple background which made one think of the Place Pigalle. But even without going so far as that, not only will the portrait of a woman by a great artist not seek in the least to give satisfaction to various demands on the woman's part—such as for instance, when she begins to age, make her have herself photographed in dresses that are almost those of a young girl, which bring out her still youthful figure and make her appear like the sister, or even the daughter of her own daughter, who, if need be, is tricked out for the occasion as a 'perfect fright' by her side—it will, on the contrary, emphasise those very drawbacks which she seeks to hide, and which (as for instance a feverish, that is to say a livid complexion) are all the more tempting to him since they give his picture 'character'; they are quite enough, however, to destroy all the illusions of the ordinary man who, when he sees the picture, sees crumble into dust the ideal which the woman herself has so proudly sustained for him, which has placed her in her unique, her unalterable form so far apart, so far above the rest of humanity. Fallen now, represented otherwise than in her own type in which she sat unassailably enthroned, she is become nothing more than just an ordinary woman, in the legend of whose superiority we have lost all faith. In this type we are so accustomed to regard as included not only the beauty of an Odette but her personality, her identity, that standing before the portrait which has thus transposed her from it we are inclined to protest not simply "How plain he has made her!" but "Why, it isn't the least bit like her!" We find it hard to believe that it can be she. We do not recognise her. And yet there is a person there on the canvas whom we are quite conscious of having seen before. But that person is not Odette; the face of the person, her body, her general appearance seem familiar. They recall to us not this particular woman who never held herself like that, whose natural pose had no suggestion of any such strange and teasing arabesque in its outlines, but other women, all the women whom Elstir has ever painted, women whom invariably, however they may differ from one another, he has chosen to plant thus on his canvas facing you, with an arched foot thrust out from under the skirt, a large round hat in one hand, symmetrically corresponding at the level of the knee which it hides to what also appears as a disc, higher up in the picture: the face. And furthermore, not only does a portrait by the hand of genius disintegrate and destroy a woman's type, as it has been defined by her coquetry and her selfish conception of beauty, but if it is also old, it is not content with ageing the original in the same way as a photograph ages its sitter, by shewing her dressed in the fashions of long ago. In a portrait, it is not only the manner the woman then had of dressing that dates it, there is also the manner the artist had of painting. And this, Elstir's earliest manner, was the most damaging of birth certificates for Odette because it not only established her, as did her photographs of the same period, as the younger sister of various time-honoured courtesans, but made her portrait contemporary with the countless portraits that Manet or Whistler had painted of all those vanished models, models who already belonged to oblivion or to history.

It was along this train of thought, meditated in silence by the side of Elstir as I accompanied him to his door, that I was being led by the discovery that I had just made of the identity of his model, when this original discovery caused me to make a second, more disturbing still, involving the identity of the artist. He had painted the portrait of Odette de Crécy. Could it possibly be that this man of genius, this sage, this eremite, this philosopher with his marvellous flow of conversation, who towered over everyone and everything, was the foolish, corrupt little painter who had at one time been 'taken up' by the Verdurins? I asked him if he had known them, whether by any chance it was he that they used to call M. Biche. He answered me in the affirmative, with no trace of embarrassment, as if my question referred to a period in his life that was ended and already somewhat remote, with no suspicion of what a cherished illusion his words were shattering in me, until looking up he read my disappointment upon my face. His own assumed an expression of annoyance. And, as we were now almost at the gate of his house, a man of less outstanding eminence, in heart and brain, might simply have said 'good-bye' to me, a trifle dryly, and taken care to avoid seeing me again. This however was not Elstir's way with me; like the master that he was—and this was, perhaps, from the point of view of sheer creative genius, his one fault, that he was a master in that sense of the word, for an artist if he is to live the true life of the spirit in its full extent, must be alone and not bestow himself with profusion, even upon disciples—from every circumstance, whether involving himself or other people, he sought to extract, for the better edification of the young, the element of truth that it contained. He chose therefore, rather than say anything that might have avenged the injury to his pride, to say what he thought would prove instructive to me. "There is no man," he began, "however wise, who has not at some period of his youth said things, or lived in a way the consciousness of which is so unpleasant to him in later life that he would gladly, if he could, expunge it from his memory. And yet he ought not entirely to regret it, because he cannot be certain that he has indeed become a wise man—so far as it is possible for any of us to be wise—unless he has passed through all the fatuous or unwholesome incarnations by which that ultimate stage must be preceded. I know that there are young fellows, the sons and grandsons of famous men, whose masters have instilled into them nobility of mind and moral refinement in their schooldays. They have, perhaps, when they look back upon their past lives, nothing to retract; they can, if they choose, publish a signed account of everything they have ever said or done; but they are poor creatures, feeble descendants of doctrinaires, and their wisdom is negative and sterile. We are not provided with wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness which no one else can take for us, an effort which no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world. The lives that you admire, the attitudes that seem noble to you are not the result of training at home, by a father, or by masters at school, they have sprung from beginnings of a very different order, by reaction from the influence of everything evil or commonplace that prevailed round about them. They represent a struggle and a victory. I can see that the picture of what we once were, in early youth, may not be recognisable and cannot, certainly, be pleasing to contemplate in later life. But we must not deny the truth of it, for it is evidence that we have really lived, that it is in accordance with the laws of life and of the mind that we have, from the common elements of life, of the life of studios, of artistic groups—assuming that one is a painter—extracted something that goes beyond them." Meanwhile we had reached his door. I was disappointed at not having met the girls. But after all there was now the possibility of meeting them again later on; they had ceased to do no more than pass beyond a horizon on which I had been ready to suppose that I should never see them reappear. Around them no longer swirled that sort of great eddy which had separated me from them, which had been merely the expression of the perpetually active desire, mobile, compelling, fed ever on fresh anxieties, which was aroused in me by their inaccessibility, their flight from me, possibly for ever. My desire for them, I could now set it at rest, hold it in reserve, among all those other desires the realisation of which, as soon as I knew it to be possible, I would cheerfully postpone. I took leave of Elstir; I was alone once again. Then all of a sudden, despite my recent disappointment, I saw in my mind's eye all that chain of coincidence which I had not supposed could possibly come about, that Elstir should be a friend of those very girls, that they who only that morning had been to me merely figures in a picture with the sea for background had seen me, had seen me walking in friendly intimacy with a great painter, who was now informed of my secret longing and would no doubt do what he could to assuage it. All this had been a source of pleasure to me, but that pleasure had remained hidden; it was one of those visitors who wait before letting us know that they are in the room until all the rest have gone and we are by ourselves. Then only do we catch sight of them, and can say to them, "I am at your service," and listen to what they have to tell us. Sometimes between the moment at which these pleasures have entered our consciousness and the moment at which we are free to entertain them, so many hours have passed, we have in the interval seen so many people that we are afraid lest they should have grown tired of waiting. But they are patient, they do not grow tired, and as soon as the crowd has gone we find them there ready for us. Sometimes it is then we who are so exhausted that it seems as though our weary mind will not have the strength left to seize and retain those memories, those impressions for which our frail self is the one habitable place, the sole means of realisation. And we should regret that failure, for existence to us is hardly interesting save on the days on which the dust of realities is shot with magic sand, on which some trivial incident of life becomes a spring of romance. Then a whole promontory of the inaccessible world rises clear in the light of our dream, and enters into our life, our life in which, like the sleeper awakened, we actually see the people of whom we have been so ardently dreaming that we came to believe that we should never behold them save in our dreams.

The sense of comfort that I drew from the probability of my now being able to meet the little band whenever I chose was all the more precious to me because I should not have been able to keep watch for them during the next few days, which would be taken up with preparations for Saint-Loup's departure. My grandmother was anxious to offer my friend some proof of her gratitude for all the kindnesses that he had shewn to her and myself. I told her that he was a great admirer of Proudhon, and this put it into her head to send for a collection of autograph letters by that philosopher which she had once bought; Saint-Loup came to her room to look at them on the day of their arrival, which was also his last day at Balbec. He read them eagerly, fingering each page with reverence, trying to get the sentences by heart; and then, rising from the table, was beginning to apologise to my grandmother for having stayed so long, when he heard her say: "No, no; take them with you; they are for you to keep; that was why I sent for them, to give them to you."

He was overpowered by a joy which he could no more control than we can a physical condition that arises without the intervention of our will. He blushed scarlet as a child who has just been whipped, and my grandmother was a great deal more touched to see all the efforts that he was making (without success) to control the joy that convulsed him than she would have been to hear any words of thanks that he could have uttered. But he, fearing that he had failed to shew his gratitude properly, begged me to make his excuses to her again, next day, leaning from the window of the little train of the local railway company which was to take him back to his regiment. The distance was, as a matter of fact, nothing. He had thought of going, as he had frequently done that summer, when he was to return the same evening and was not encumbered with luggage, by road. But this time he would have had, anyhow, to put all his heavy luggage in the train. And he found it simpler to take the train himself also, following the advice of the manager who, on being consulted, replied that "Carriage or train, it was more or less equivocal." He meant us to understand that they were equivalent (in fact, very much what Françoise would have expressed as "coming to as near as made no difference"). "Very well," Saint-Loup had decided, "I will take the 'little crawler.'" I should have taken it too, had I not been tired, and gone with my friend to Doncières; failing this I kept on promising, all the time that we waited in the Balbec station—the time, that is to say, which the driver of the little train spent in waiting for unpunctual friends, without whom he refused to start, and also in seeking some refreshment for himself—to go over there and see him several times a week. As Bloch had come to the station also—much to Saint-Loup's disgust—the latter, seeing that our companion could hear him begging me to come to luncheon, to dinner, to stay altogether at Doncières, finally turned to him and, in the most forbidding tone, intended to counteract the forced civility of the invitation and to prevent Bloch from taking it seriously: "If you ever happen to be passing through Doncières any afternoon when I am off duty, you might ask for me at the barracks; but I hardly ever am off duty." Perhaps, also, Robert feared lest, if left to myself, I might not come, and, thinking that I was more intimate with Bloch than I made out, was providing me in this way with a travelling companion, one who would urge me on.

I was afraid that this tone, this way of inviting a person while warning him not to come, might have wounded Bloch, and felt that Saint-Loup would have done better, saying nothing. But I was mistaken, for after the train had gone, while we were walking back together as far as the crossroads at which we should have to part, one road going to the hotel, the other to the Blochs' villa, he never ceased from asking me on what day we should go to Doncières, for after "all the civilities that Saint-Loup had shewn" him, it would be 'too unmannerly' on his part not to accept the invitation. I was glad that he had not noticed, or was so little displeased as to wish to let it be thought that he had not noticed on how far from pressing, how barely polite a note the invitation had been sounded. At the same time I should have liked Bloch, for his own sake, to refrain from making a fool of himself by going over at once to Doncières. But I dared not offer a piece of advice which could only have offended him by hinting that Saint-Loup had been less pressing than himself impressed. He was a great deal too ready to respond, and even if all his faults of this nature were atoned for by remarkable qualities which others, with more reserve than he, would not possess, he carried indiscretion to a pitch that was almost maddening. The week must not, to hear him speak, pass without our going to Doncières (he said 'our' for I think that he counted to some extent on my presence there as an excuse for his own). All the way home, opposite the gymnasium, in its grove of trees, opposite the lawn-tennis courts, the mayor's office, the shell-fish stall, he stopped me, imploring me to fix a day, and, as I did not, left me in a towering rage, saying: "As your lordship pleases. For my part, I'm obliged to go since he has invited me."

Saint-Loup was still so much afraid of not having thanked my grandmother properly that he charged me once again to express his gratitude to her a day or two later in a letter I received from him from the town in which he was quartered, a town which seemed, on the envelope where the post-mark had stamped its name, to be hastening to me across country, to tell me that within its walls, in the Louis XVI cavalry barracks, he was thinking of me. The paper was embossed with the arms of Marsantes, in which I could make out a lion, surmounted by a coronet formed by the cap of a Peer of France.

"After a journey which," he wrote, "passed pleasantly enough, with a book I bought at the station, by Arvède Barine (a Russian author, I fancy; it seemed to me remarkably well written for a foreigner, but you shall give me your critical opinion, you are bound to know all about it, you fount of knowledge who have read everything), here I am again in the thick of this debased existence, where, alas, I feel a sad exile, not having here what I had to leave at Balbec; this life in which I cannot discover one affectionate memory, any intellectual attraction; an environment on which you would probably look with contempt—and yet it has a certain charm. Everything seems to have changed since I was last here, for in the interval one of the most important periods in my life, that from which our friendship dates, has begun. I hope that it may never come to an end. I have spoken of our friendship, of you, to one person only, to the friend I told you of, who has just paid me a surprise visit here. She would like immensely to know you, and I feel that you would get on well together, for she too is extremely literary. I, on the other hand, to go over in my mind all our talk, to live over again those hours which I never shall forget, have shut myself off from my comrades, excellent fellows, but altogether incapable of understanding that sort of thing. This remembrance of moments spent with you I should almost have preferred, on my first day here, to call up for my own solitary enjoyment, without writing. But I was afraid lest you, with your subtle mind and ultra-sensitive heart, might, if you did not hear from me, needlessly torment yourself, if, that is to say, you still condescend to occupy your thoughts with this blunt trooper whom you will have a hard task to polish and refine, and make a little more subtle and worthier of your company."

On the whole this letter, in its affectionate spirit, was not at all unlike those which, when I did not yet know Saint-Loup, I had imagined that he would write to me, in those daydreams from which the coldness of his first greeting had shaken me by bringing me face to face with an icy reality which was not, however, to endure. Once I had received this letter, whenever, at luncheon-time, the post was brought in, I could tell at once when it was from him that a letter came, for it had always that second face which a person assumes when he is absent, in the features of which (the characters of his script) there is no reason why we should not suppose that we are tracing an individual soul just as much as in the line of a nose or the inflexions of a voice.

I would now gladly remain at the table while it was being cleared, and, if it was not a moment at which the girls of the little band might be passing, it was no longer solely towards the sea that I would turn my eyes. Since I had seen such things depicted in water-colours by Elstir, I sought to find again in reality, I cherished, as though for their poetic beauty, the broken gestures of the knives still lying across one another, the swollen convexity of a discarded napkin upon which the sun would patch a scrap of yellow velvet, the half-empty glass which thus shewed to greater advantage the noble sweep of its curved sides, and, in the heart of its translucent crystal, clear as frozen daylight, a dreg of wine, dusky but sparkling with reflected lights, the displacement of solid objects, the transmutation of liquids by the effect of light and shade, the shifting colour of the plums which passed from green to blue and from blue to golden yellow in the half-plundered dish, the chairs, like a group of old ladies, that came twice daily to take their places round the white cloth spread on the table as on an altar at which were celebrated the rites of the palate, where in the hollows of oyster-shells a few drops of lustral water had gathered as in tiny holy water stoups of stone; I tried to find beauty there where I had never imagined before that it could exist, in the most ordinary things, in the profundities of 'still life.'

When, some days after Saint-Loup's departure, I had succeeded in persuading Elstir to give a small tea-party, at which I was to meet Albertine, that freshness of appearance, that smartness of attire, both (alas) fleeting, which were to be observed in me at the moment of my starting out from the Grand Hotel, and were due respectively to a longer rest than usual and to special pains over my toilet, I regretted my inability to reserve them (and also the credit accruing from Elstir's friendship) for the captivation of some other, more interesting person; I regretted having to use them all up on the simple pleasure of making Albertine's acquaintance. My brain assessed this pleasure at a very low value now that it was assured me. But, inside, my will did not for a moment share this illusion, that will which is the persevering and unalterable servant of our successive personalities; hiding itself in secret places, despised, downtrodden, untiringly faithful, toiling without intermission and with no thought for the variability of the self, its master, if only that master may never lack what he requires. Whereas at the moment when we are just about to start on a long-planned and eagerly awaited holiday, our brain, our nerves begin to ask themselves whether it is really worth all the trouble involved, the will, knowing that those lazy masters would at once begin to consider their journey the most wonderful experience, if it became impossible for them to take it, the will leaves them explaining their difficulties outside the station, multiplying their hesitations; but busies itself with taking the tickets and putting us into the carriage before the train starts. It is as invariable as brain and nerves are fickle, but as it is silent, gives no account of its actions, it seems almost non-existent; it is by its dogged determination that the other constituent parts of our personality are led, but without seeing it, while they distinguish clearly all their own uncertainties. My nerves and brain then started a discussion as to the real value of the pleasure that there would be in knowing Albertine, while I studied in the glass vain and perishable attractions which nerves and brain would have preserved intact for use on some other occasion. But my will would not let the hour pass at which I must start, and it was Elstir's address that it called out to the driver. Brain and nerves were at liberty, now that the die was cast, to think this 'a pity.' If my will had given the man a different address, they would have been finely 'sold.'

When I arrived at Elstir's, a few minutes later, my first impression was that Mlle. Simonet was not in the studio. There was certainly a girl sitting there in a silk frock, bareheaded, but one whose marvellous hair, whose nose, meant nothing to me, in whom I did not recognise the human entity that I had formed out of a young cyclist strolling past, in a polo-cap, between myself and the sea. It was Albertine, nevertheless. But even when I knew it to be she, I gave her no thought. On entering any social gathering, when we are young, we lose consciousness of our old self, we become a different man, every drawing-room being a fresh universe, in which, coming under the sway of a new moral perspective, we fasten our attention, as if they were to matter to us for all time, on people, dances, card-tables, all of which we shall have forgotten by the morning. Obliged to follow, if I was to arrive at the goal of conversation with Albertine, a road in no way of my own planning, which first brought me to a halt at Elstir, passed by other groups of guests to whom I was presented, then along the table, at which I was offered, and ate, a strawberry tart or two, while I listened, motionless, to the music that was beginning in another part of the room, I found myself giving to these various incidents the same importance as to my introduction to Mlle. Simonet, an introduction which was now nothing more than one among several such incidents, having entirely forgotten that it had been, but a few minutes since, my sole object in coming there that day. But is it not ever thus in the bustle of daily life, with every true happiness, every great sorrow? In a room full of other people we receive from her whom we love the answer, propitious or fatal, which we have been awaiting for the last year. But we must go on talking, ideas come, one after another, forming a smooth surface which is pricked, at the very most, now and then by a dull throb from within of the memory, deep-rooted enough but of very slender growth, that misfortune has come upon us. If, instead of misfortune, it is happiness, it may be that not until many years have elapsed will we recall that the most important event in our sentimental life occurred without our having time to give it any prolonged attention, or even to become aware of it almost, at a social gathering, it may have been, to which we had gone solely in expectation of that event.

When Elstir asked me to come with him so that he might introduce me to Albertine, who was sitting a little farther down the room, I first of all finished eating a coffee *éclair* and, with a show of keen interest, asked an old gentleman whose acquaintance I had just made (and thought that I might, perhaps, offer him the rose in my buttonhole which he had admired) to tell me more about the old Norman fairs. This is not to say that the introduction which followed did not give me any pleasure, nor assume a definite importance in my eyes. But so far as the pleasure was concerned, I was not conscious of it, naturally, until some time later, when, once more in the hotel, and in my room alone, I had become myself again. Pleasure in this respect is like photography. What we take, in the presence of the beloved object, is merely a negative film; we develop it later, when we are at home, and have once again found at our disposal that inner darkroom, the entrance to which is barred to us so long as we are with other people.

If my consciousness of the pleasure it had brought me was thus retarded by a few hours, the importance of this introduction I felt immediately. At such moments of introduction, for all that we feel ourselves to have been suddenly enriched, to have been furnished with a pass that will admit us henceforward to pleasures which we have been pursuing for weeks past, but in vain, we realise only too clearly that this acquisition puts an end for us not merely to hours of toilsome search—a relief that could only fill us with joy—but also to the very existence of a certain person, her whom our imagination had wildly distorted, our anxious fear that we might never become known to her enlarged. At the moment when our name sounds on the lips of the person introducing us, especially if he amplifies it, as Elstir was now doing, with a flattering account of us—in that sacramental moment, as when in a fairy tale the magician commands a person suddenly to become someone else, she to whose presence we have been longing to attain vanishes; how could she remain the same when, for one thing—owing to the attention which the stranger is obliged to pay to the announcement of our name and the sight of our person—in the eyes that only yesterday were situated at an infinite distance (where we supposed that our eyes, wandering, uncontrolled, desperate, divergent, would never succeed in meeting them) the conscious gaze, the incommunicable thought which we have been seeking have been miraculously and quite simply replaced by our own image, painted in them as though behind the glass of a smiling mirror. If this incarnation of ourself in the person who seems to differ most from us is what does most to modify the appearance of the person to whom we have just been introduced, the form of that person still remains quite vague; and we are free to ask ourself whether she will turn out to be a god, a table or a basin. But, as nimble as the wax-modellers who will fashion a bust before our eyes in five minutes, the few words which the stranger is now going to say to us will substantiate her form, will give her something positive and final that will exclude all the hypotheses by which, a moment ago, our desire, our imagination were being tempted. Doubtless, even before her coming to this party, Albertine had ceased to be to me simply that sole phantom worthy to haunt our life which is what remains of a passing stranger, of whom we know nothing and have caught but the barest glimpse. Her relation to Mme. Bontemps had already restricted the scope of those marvellous hypotheses, by stopping one of the channels along which they might have spread. As I drew closer to the girl, and began to know her better, my knowledge of her underwent a process of subtraction, all the factors of imagination and desire giving place to a notion which was worth infinitely less, a notion to which, it must be admitted, there was added presently what was more or less the equivalent, in the domain of real life, of what joint stock companies give one, after paying interest on one's capital, and call a bonus. Her name, her family connexions had been the original limit set to my suppositions. Her friendly greeting while, standing close beside her, I saw once again the tiny mole on her cheek, below her eye, marked another stage; last of all, I was surprised to hear her use the adverb 'perfectly' (in place of 'quite') of two people whom she mentioned, saying of one: "She is perfectly mad, but very nice for all that," and of the other, "He is a perfectly common man, a perfect bore." However little to be commended this use of 'perfectly' may be, it indicates a degree of civilisation and culture which I could never have imagined as having been attained by the bacchante with the bicycle, the frenzied muse of the golf-course. Nor did it mean that after this first transformation Albertine was not to change again for me, many times. The good and bad qualities which a person presents to us, exposed to view on the surface of his or her face, rearrange themselves in a totally different order if we approach them from another angle—just as, in a town, buildings that appear strung irregularly along a single line, from another aspect retire into a graduated distance, and their relative heights are altered. To begin with, Albertine now struck me as not implacable so much as almost frightened; she seemed to me rather respectably than ill bred, judging by the description, 'bad style,' 'a comic manner' which she applied to each in turn of the girls of whom I spoke to her; finally, she presented as a target for my line of sight a temple that was distinctly flushed and hardly attractive to the eye, and no longer the curious gaze which I had always connected with her until then. But this was merely a second impression and there were doubtless others through which I was successively to pass. Thus it can be only after one has recognised, not without having had to feel one's way, the optical illusions of one's first impression that one can arrive at an exact knowledge of another person, supposing such knowledge to be ever possible. But it is not; for while our original impression of him undergoes correction, the person himself, not being an inanimate object, changes in himself, we think that we have caught him, he moves, and, when we imagine that at last we are seeing him clearly, it is only the old impressions which we had already formed of him that we have succeeded in making clearer, when they no longer represent him.

And yet, whatever the inevitable disappointments that it must bring in its train, this movement towards what we have only half seen, what we have been free to dwell upon and imagine at our leisure, this movement is the only one that is wholesome for the senses, that whets the appetite. How dreary a monotony must pervade those people's lives who, from indolence or timidity, drive in their carriages straight to the doors of friends whom they have got to know without having first dreamed of knowing them, without ever daring, on the way, to stop and examine what arouses their desire.

I returned home, my mind full of the party, the coffee *éclair* which I had finished eating before I let Elstir take me up to Albertine, the rose which I had given the old gentleman, all the details selected without our knowledge by the circumstances of the occasion, which compose in a special and quite fortuitous order the picture that we retain of a first meeting. But this picture, I had the impression that I was seeing it from a fresh point of view, a long way remote from myself, realising that it had not existed only for me, when some months later, to my great surprise, on my speaking to Albertine on the day on which I had first met her, she reminded me of the *éclair*, the flower that I had given away, all those things which I had supposed to have been—I will not say of importance only to myself but—perceived only by myself, and which I now found thus transcribed, in a version the existence of which I had never suspected, in the mind of Albertine. On this first day itself, when, on my return to the hotel, I was able to visualise the memory which I had brought away with me, I realised the consummate adroitness with which the sleight of hand had been performed, and how I had talked for a moment or two with a person who, thanks to the skill of the conjurer, without actually embodying anything of that other person whom I had for so long been following as she paced beside the sea, had been effectively substituted for her. I might, for that matter, have guessed as much in advance, since the girl of the beach was a fabrication invented by myself. In spite of which, as I had, in my conversations with Elstir, identified her with this other girl, I felt myself in honour bound to fulfil to the real the promises of love made to the imagined Albertine. We betroth ourselves by proxy, and think ourselves obliged, in the sequel, to marry the person who has intervened. Moreover, if there had disappeared, provisionally at any rate, from my life, an anguish that found adequate consolation in the memory of polite manners, of that expression 'perfectly common' and of the glowing temple, that memory awakened in me desire of another kind which, for all that it was placid and not at all painful, resembling rather brotherly love, might in the long run become fully as dangerous by making me feel at every moment a compelling need to kiss this new person, whose charming ways, shyness, unlooked-for accessibility, arrested the futile process of my imagination but gave birth to a sentimental gratitude. And then, since memory begins at once to record photographs independent of one another, eliminates every link, any kind of sequence from between the scenes portrayed in the collection which it exposes to our view, the most recent does not necessarily destroy or cancel those that came before. Confronted with the commonplace though appealing Albertine to whom I had spoken that afternoon, I still saw the other, mysterious Albertine outlined against the sea. These were now memories, that is to say pictures neither of which now seemed to me any more true than the other. But, to make an end of this first afternoon of my introduction to Albertine, when trying to recapture that little mole on her cheek, just under the eye, I remembered that, looking from Elstir's window, when Albertine had gone by, I had seen the mole on her chin. In fact, whenever I saw her I noticed that she had a mole, but my inaccurate memory made it wander about the face of Albertine, fixing it now in one place, now in another.

Whatever my disappointment in finding in Mlle. Simonet a girl so little different from those that I knew already, just as my rude awakening when I saw Balbec Church did not prevent me from wishing still to go to Quimperlé, Pont-Aven and Venice, I comforted myself with the thought that through Albertine at any rate, even if she herself was not all that I had hoped, I might make the acquaintance of her comrades of the little band.

I thought at first that I should fail. As she was to be staying (and I too) for a long time still at Balbec, I had decided that the best thing was not to make my efforts to meet her too apparent, but to wait for an accidental encounter. But should this occur every day, even, it was greatly to be feared that she would confine herself to acknowledging my bow from a distance, and such meetings, repeated day after day throughout the whole season, would benefit me not at all.

Shortly after this, one morning when it had been raining and was almost cold, I was accosted on the 'front' by a girl wearing a close-fitting toque and carrying a muff, so different from the girl whom I had met at Elstir's party that to recognise in her the same person seemed an operation beyond the power of the human mind; mine was, nevertheless, successful in performing it, but after a momentary surprise which did not, I think, escape Albertine's notice. On the other hand, when I instinctively recalled the good breeding which had so impressed me before, she filled me with a converse astonishment by her rude tone and manners typical of the 'little band.' Apart from these, her temple had ceased to be the optical centre, on which the eye might comfortably rest, of her face, either because I was now on her other side, or because her toque hid it, or else possibly because its inflammation was not a constant thing. "What weather!" she began. "Really the perpetual summer of Balbec is all stuff and nonsense. You don't go in for anything special here, do you? We don't ever see you playing golf, or dancing at the Casino. You don't ride, either. You must be bored stiff. You don't find it too deadly, staying about on the beach all day? I see, you just bask in the sun like a lizard; you enjoy that. You must have plenty of time on your hands. I can see you're not like me; I simply adore all sports. You weren't at the Sogne races! We went in the 'tram,' and I can quite believe you don't see the fun of going in an old 'tin-pot' like that. It took us two whole hours! I could have gone there and back three times on my bike." I, who had been lost in admiration of Saint-Loup when he, in the most natural manner in the world, called the little local train the 'crawler,' because of the ceaseless windings of its line, was positively alarmed by the glibness with which Albertine spoke of the 'tram,' and called it a 'tin-pot.' I could feel her mastery of a form of speech in which I was afraid of her detecting and scorning my inferiority. And yet the full wealth of the synonyms that the little band possessed to denote this railway had not yet been revealed to me. In speaking, Albertine kept her head motionless, her nostrils closed, allowing only the corners of her lips to move. The result of this was a drawling, nasal sound, into the composition of which there entered perhaps a provincial descent, a juvenile affectation of British phlegm, the teaching of a foreign governess and a congestive hypertrophy of the mucus of the nose. This enunciation which, as it happened, soon disappeared when she knew people better, giving place to a natural girlish tone, might have been thought unpleasant. But it was peculiar to herself, and delighted me. Whenever I had gone for several days without seeing her, I would refresh my spirit by repeating to myself: "We don't ever see you playing golf," with the nasal intonation in which she had uttered the words, point blank, without moving a muscle of her face. And I thought then that there could be no one in the world so desirable.

We formed that morning one of those couples who dotted the 'front' here and there with their conjunction, their stopping together for time enough just to exchange a few words before breaking apart, each to resume separately his or her divergent stroll. I seized the opportunity, while she stood still, to look again and discover once and for all where exactly the little mole was placed. Then, just as a phrase of Vinteuil which had delighted me in the sonata, and which my recollection allowed to wander from the andante to the finale, until the day when, having the score in my hands, I was able to find it, and to fix it in my memory in its proper place, in the scherzo, so this mole, which I had visualised now on her cheek, now on her chin, came to rest for ever on her upper lip, just below her nose. In the same way, too, do we come with amazement upon lines that we know by heart in a poem in which we never dreamed that they were to be found.

At that moment, as if in order that against the sea there might multiply in freedom, in the variety of its forms, all the rich decorative whole which was the lovely unfolding of the train of maidens, at once golden and rosy, baked by sun and wind, Albertine's friends, with their shapely limbs, their supple figures, but so different one from another, came into sight in a cluster that expanded as it approached, advancing towards us, but keeping closer to the sea, along a parallel line. I asked Albertine's permission to walk for a little way with her. Unfortunately, all she did was to wave her hand to them in greeting. "But your friends will be disappointed if you don't go with them," I hinted, hoping that we might all walk together. A young man with regular features, carrying a bag of golf-clubs, sauntered up to us. It was the baccarat-player, whose fast ways so enraged the chief magistrate's wife. In a frigid, impassive tone, which he evidently regarded as an indication of the highest refinement, he bade Albertine good day. "Been playing golf, Octave?" she asked. "How did the game go? Were you in form?" "Oh, it's too sickening; I can't play for nuts," he replied. "Was Andrée playing?" "Yes, she went round in seventy-seven." "Why, that's a record!" "I went round in eighty-two yesterday." He was the son of an immensely rich manufacturer who was to take an important part in the organisation of the coming World's Fair. I was struck by the extreme degree to which, in this young man and in the other by no means numerous male friends of the band of girls, the knowledge of everything that pertained to clothes and how to wear them, cigars, English drinks, horses, a knowledge which he possessed in its minutest details with a haughty infallibility that approached the reticent modesty of the true expert, had been developed in complete isolation, unaccompanied by the least trace of any intellectual culture. He had no hesitation as to the right time and place for dinner-jacket or pyjamas, but neither had he any suspicion of the circumstances in which one might or might not employ this or that word, or even of the simplest rules of grammar. This disparity between the two forms of culture must have existed also in his father, the President of the Syndicate that 'ran' Balbec, for, in an open letter to the electors which he had recently had posted on all the walls, he announced: "I desired to see the Mayor, to speak to him of the matter; he would not listen to my righteous plaint." Octave, at the Casino, took prizes in all the dancing competitions, for bostons, tangos and what-not, an accomplishment that would entitle him, if he chose, to make a fine marriage in that seaside society where it is not figuratively but in sober earnest that the young women 'marry their dancing-partners.' He lighted a cigar with a "D'you mind?" to Albertine, as one who asks permission to finish, while going on talking, an urgent piece of work. For he was one of those people who can never be 'doing nothing,' although there was nothing, for that matter, that he could ever be said to do. And as complete inactivity has the same effect on us, in the end, as prolonged overwork, and on the character as much as on the life of body and muscles, the unimpaired nullity of intellect that was enshrined behind Octave's meditative brow had ended by giving him, despite his air of unruffled calm, ineffectual longings to think which kept him awake at night, for all the world like an overwrought philosopher.

Supposing that if I knew their male friends I should have more opportunities of seeing the girls, I had been on the point of asking for an introduction to Octave. I told Albertine this, as soon as he had left us, still muttering, "I couldn't play for nuts!" I thought I would thus put into her head the idea of doing it next time. "But I can't," she cried, "introduce you to a tame cat like that. This place simply swarms with them. But what on earth would they have to say to you? That one plays golf quite well, and that's all there is to it. I know what I'm talking about; you'd find he wasn't at all your sort." "Your friends will be cross with you if you desert them like this," I repeated, hoping that she would then suggest my joining the party. "Oh, no, they don't want me." We ran into Bloch, who directed at me a subtle, insinuating smile, and, embarrassed by the presence of Albertine, whom he did not know, or, rather, knew 'without knowing' her, bent his head with a stiff, almost irritated jerk. "What's he called, that Ostrogoth?" Albertine asked. "I can't think why he should bow to me; he doesn't know me. And I didn't bow to him, either." I had no time to explain to her, for, bearing straight down upon us, "Excuse me," he began, "for interrupting you, but I must tell you that I am going to Doncières to-morrow. I cannot put it off any longer without discourtesy; indeed, I ask myself, what must de Saint-Loup-en-Bray think of me. I just came to let you know that I shall take the two o'clock train. At your service." But I thought now only of seeing Albertine again, and of trying to get to know her friends, and Doncières, since they were not going there, and my going would bring me back too late to see them still on the beach, seemed to me to be situated at the other end of the world. I told Bloch that it was impossible. "Oh, very well, I shall go alone. In the fatuous words of Master Arouet, I shall say to Saint-Loup, to beguile his clericalism:

'My duty stands alone, by his in no way bound;
Though he should choose to fail, yet faithful I'll be found.' "

"I admit he's not a bad looking boy," was Albertine's comment, "but he makes me feel quite sick." I had never thought that Bloch might be 'not a bad looking boy'; and yet, when one came to think of it, so he was. With his rather prominent brow, very aquiline nose, and his air of extreme cleverness and of being convinced of his cleverness, he had a pleasing face. But he could not succeed in pleasing Albertine. This was perhaps due, to some extent, to her own disadvantages, the harshness, the want of feeling of the little band, its rudeness towards everything that was not itself. And later on, when I introduced them, Albertine's antipathy for him grew no less. Bloch belonged to a section of society in which, between the free and easy customs of the 'smart set' and the regard for good manners which a man is supposed to shew who 'does not soil his hands,' a sort of special compromise has been reached which differs from the manners of the world and is nevertheless a peculiarly unpleasant form of worldliness. When he was introduced to anyone he would bow with a sceptical smile, and at the same time with an exaggerated show of respect, and, if it was to a man, would say: "Pleased to meet you, sir," in a voice which ridiculed the words that it was uttering, though with a consciousness of belonging to some one who was no fool. Having sacrificed this first moment to a custom which he at once followed and derided (just as on the first of January he would greet you with a 'Many happy!') he would adopt an air of infinite cunning, and would 'proffer subtle words' which were often true enough but 'got on' Albertine's nerves. When I told her on this first day that his name was Bloch, she exclaimed: "I would have betted anything he was a Jew-boy. Trust them to put their foot in it!" Moreover, Bloch was destined to give Albertine other grounds for annoyance later on. Like many intellectuals, he was incapable of saying a simple thing in a simple way. He would find some precious qualification for every statement, and would sweep from particular to general. It vexed Albertine, who was never too well pleased at other people's shewing an interest in what she was doing, that when she had sprained her ankle and was keeping quiet, Bloch said of her: "She is outstretched on her chair, but in her ubiquity has not ceased to frequent simultaneously vague golf-courses and dubious tennis-courts." He was simply being 'literary,' of course, but this, in view of the difficulties which Albertine felt that it might create for her with friends whose invitations she had declined on the plea that she was unable to move, was quite enough to disgust her with the face, the sound of the voice, of the young man who could say such things about her. We parted, Albertine and I, after promising to take a walk together later. I had talked to her without being any more conscious of where my words were falling, of what became of them, than if I were dropping pebbles into a bottomless pit. That our words are, as a general rule, filled, by the person to whom we address them, with a meaning which that person derives from her own substance, a meaning widely different from that which we had put into the same words when we uttered them, is a fact which the daily round of life is perpetually demonstrating. But if we find ourselves as well in the company of a person whose education (as Albertine's was to me) is inconceivable, her tastes, her reading, her principles unknown, we cannot tell whether our words have aroused in her anything that resembles their meaning, any more than in an animal, although there are things that even an animal may be made to understand. So that to attempt any closer friendship with Albertine seemed to me like placing myself in contact with the unknown, if not the impossible, an occupation as arduous as breaking a horse, as reposeful as keeping bees or growing roses.

I had thought, a few hours before, that Albertine would acknowledge my bow but would not speak to me. We had now parted, after planning to make some excursion soon together. I vowed that when I next met Albertine I would treat her with greater boldness, and I had sketched out in advance a draft of all that I would say to her, and even (being now quite convinced that she was not strait-laced) of all the favours that I would demand of her. But the mind is subject to external influences, as plants are, and cells and chemical elements, and the medium in which its immersion alters it is a change of circumstances, or new surroundings. Grown different by the mere fact of her presence, when I found myself once again in Albertine's company, what I said to her was not at all what I had meant to say. Remembering her flushed temple, I asked myself whether she might not appreciate more keenly a polite attention which she knew to be disinterested. Besides, I was embarrassed by certain things in her look, in her smile. They might equally well signify a laxity of morals and the rather silly merriment of a girl who though full of spirits was at heart thoroughly respectable. A single expression, on a face as in speech, is susceptible of divers interpretations, and I stood hesitating like a schoolboy faced by the difficulties of a piece of Greek prose.

On this occasion we met almost immediately the tall one, Andrée, the one who had jumped over the old banker, and Albertine was obliged to introduce me. Her friend had a pair of eyes of extraordinary brightness, like, in a dark house, a glimpse through an open door of a room into which the sun is shining with a greenish reflexion from the glittering sea.

A party of five were passing, men whom I had come to know very well by sight during my stay at Balbec. I had often wondered who they could be. "They're nothing very wonderful," said Albertine with a sneering laugh. "The little old one with dyed hair and yellow gloves has a fine touch; he knows how to draw all right, he's the Balbec dentist; he's a good sort. The fat one is the Mayor, not the tiny little fat one, you must have seen him before, he's the dancing master; he's rather a beast, you know; he can't stand us, because we make such a row at the Casino; we smash his chairs, and want to have the carpet up when we dance; that's why he never gives us prizes, though we're the only girls there who can dance a bit. The dentist is a dear, I would have said how d'ye do to him, just to make the dancing master swear, but I couldn't because they've got M. de Sainte-Croix with them; he's on the General Council; he comes of a very good family, but he's joined the Republicans, to make more money. No nice people ever speak to him now. He knows my uncle, because they're both in the Government, but the rest of my family always cut him. The thin one in the waterproof is the bandmaster. You know him, of course. You don't? Oh, he plays divinely. You haven't been to *Cavalleria Rusticana?* I thought it too lovely! He's giving a concert this evening, but we can't go because it's to be in the town hall. In the Casino it wouldn't matter, but in the town hall, where they've taken down the crucifix. Andrée's mother would have a fit if we went there. You're going to say that my aunt's husband is in the Government. But what difference does that make? My aunt is my aunt. That's not why I'm fond of her. The only thing she has ever wanted has been to get rid of me. No, the person who has really been a mother to me, and all the more credit to her because she's no relation at all, is a friend of mine whom I love just as much as if she was my mother. I will let you see her 'photo.' " We were joined for a moment by the golf champion and baccarat plunger, Octave. I thought that I had discovered a bond between us, for I learned in the course of conversation that he was some sort of relative, and even more a friend of the Verdurins. But he spoke contemptuously of the famous Wednesdays, adding that M. Verdurin had never even heard of a dinner-jacket, which made it a horrid bore when one ran into him in a music-hall, where one would very much rather not be greeted with "Well, you young rascal," by an old fellow in a frock coat and black tie, for all the world like a village lawyer. Octave left us, and soon it was Andrée's turn, when we came to her villa, into which she vanished without having uttered a single word to me during the whole of our walk. I regretted her departure, all the more in that, while I was complaining to Albertine how chilling her friend had been with me, and was comparing in my mind this difficulty which Albertine seemed to find in making me know her friends with the hostility that Elstir, when he might have granted my desire, seemed to have encountered on that first afternoon, two girls came by to whom I lifted my hat, the young Ambresacs, whom Albertine greeted also.

I felt that, in Albertine's eyes, my position would be improved by this meeting. They were the daughters of a kinswoman of Mme. de Villeparisis, who was also a friend of Mme. de Luxembourg. M. and Mme. d'Ambresac, who had a small villa at Balbec and were immensely rich, led the simplest of lives there, and always went about dressed he in an unvarying frock coat, she in a dark gown. Both of them used to make sweeping bows to my grandmother, which never led to anything further. The daughters, who were very pretty, were dressed more fashionably, but in a fashion suited rather to Paris than to the seaside. With their long skirts and large hats, they had the look of belonging to a different race from Albertine. She, I discovered, knew all about them.

"Oh, so you know the little d'Ambresacs, do you? Dear me, you have some swagger friends. After all, they're very simple souls," she went on as though this might account for it. "They're very nice, but so well brought up that they aren't allowed near the Casino, for fear of us—we've such a bad tone. They attract you, do they? Well, it all depends on what you like. They're just little white rabbits, really. There may be something in that, of course. If little white rabbits are what appeals to you, they may supply a long-felt want. It seems, there must be some attraction, because one of them has got engaged already to the Marquis de Saint-Loup. Which is a cruel blow to the younger one, who is madly in love with that young man. I'm sure, the way they speak to you with their lips shut is quite enough for me. And then they dress in the most absurd way. Fancy going to play golf in silk frocks! At their age, they dress more showily than grown-up women who really know about clothes. Look at Mme. Elstir; there's a well dressed woman if you like." I answered that she had struck me as being dressed with the utmost simplicity. Albertine laughed. "She does put on the simplest things, I admit, but she dresses wonderfully, and to get what you call simplicity costs her a fortune." Mme. Elstir's gowns passed unnoticed by any one who had not a sober and unerring taste in matters of attire. This was lacking in me. Elstir possessed it in a supreme degree, or so Albertine told me. I had not suspected this, nor that the beautiful but quite simple objects which littered his studio were treasures long desired by him which he had followed from sale room to sale room, knowing all their history, until he had made enough money to be able to acquire them. But as to this Albertine, being as ignorant as myself, could not enlighten me. Whereas when it came to clothes, prompted by a coquettish instinct, and perhaps by the regretful longing of a penniless girl who is able to appreciate with greater disinterestedness, more delicacy of feeling, in other, richer people the things that she will never be able to afford for herself, she expressed herself admirably on the refinement of Elstir's taste, so hard to satisfy that all women appeared to him badly dressed, while, attaching infinite importance to right proportions and shades of colour, he would order to be made for his wife, at fabulous prices, the sunshades, hats and cloaks which he had learned from Albertine to regard as charming, and which a person wanting in taste would no more have noticed than myself. Apart from this, Albertine, who had done a little painting, though without, she confessed, having any 'gift' for it, felt a boundless admiration for Elstir, and, thanks to his precept and example, shewed a judgment of pictures which was in marked contrast to her enthusiasm for *Cavalleria Rusticana*. The truth was, though as yet it was hardly apparent, that she was highly intelligent, and that in the things that she said the stupidity was not her own but that of her environment and age. Elstir's had been a good but only a partial influence. All the branches of her intelligence had not reached the same stage of development. The taste for pictures had almost caught up the taste for clothes and all forms of smartness, but had not been followed by the taste for music, which was still a long way behind.

Albertine might know all about the Ambresacs; but as he who can achieve great things is not necessarily capable of small, I did not find her, after I had bowed to those young ladies, any better disposed to make me known to her friends. "It's too good of you to attach any importance to them. You shouldn't take any notice of them; they don't count. What on earth can a lot of kids like them mean to a man like you? Now Andrée, I must say, is remarkably clever. She is a good girl, that, though she is perfectly fantastic at times, but the others are really dreadfully stupid." When I had left Albertine, I felt suddenly a keen regret that Saint-Loup should have concealed his engagement from me and that he should be doing anything so improper as to choose a wife before breaking with his mistress. And then, shortly afterwards, I met Andrée, and as she went on talking to me for some time I seized the opportunity to tell her that I would very much like to see her again next day, but she replied that this was impossible, because her mother was not at all well, and she would have to stay beside her. The next day but one, when I was at Elstir's, he told me how greatly Andrée had been attracted by me; on my protesting: "But it was I who was attracted by her from the start; I asked her to meet me again yesterday, but she could not." "Yes, I know; she told me all about that," was his reply, "she was very sorry, but she had promised to go to a picnic, somewhere miles from here. They were to drive over in a break, and it was too late for her to get out of it." Albeit this falsehood (Andrée knowing me so slightly) was of no real importance, I ought not to have continued to seek the company of a person who was capable of uttering it. For what people have once done they will do again indefinitely, and if you go every year to see a friend who, the first time, was not able to meet you at the appointed place, or was in bed with a chill, you will find him in bed with another chill which he has just caught, you will miss him again at another meeting-place at which he has failed to appear, for a single and unalterable reason in place of which he supposes himself to have various reasons, drawn from the circumstances. One morning, not long after Andrée's telling me that she would be obliged to stay beside her mother, I was taking a short stroll with Albertine, whom I had found on the beach tossing up and catching again on a cord an oddly shaped implement which gave her a look of Giotto's 'Idolatry'; it was called, for that matter, 'Diabolo,' and is so fallen into disuse now that, when they come upon the picture of a girl playing with one, the critics of future generations will solemnly discuss, as it might be over one of the allegorical figures in the Arena, what it is that she is holding. A moment later their friend with the penurious and harsh appearance, the same one who on that first day had sneered so malevolently: "I do feel sorry for him, poor old man," when she saw the old gentleman's head brushed by the flying feet of Andrée, came up to Albertine with "Good morning, 'm I disturbing you?" She had taken off her hat, for comfort, and her hair, like a strange and fascinating plant, lay over her brow, displaying all the delicate tracery of its foliation. Albertine, perhaps because she resented seeing the other bare-headed, made no reply, preserved a frigid silence in spite of which the girl stayed with us, kept apart from myself by Albertine, who arranged at one moment to be alone with her, at another to walk with me leaving her to follow. I was obliged, to secure an introduction, to ask for it in the girl's hearing. Then, as Albertine was uttering my name, on the face and in the blue eyes of this girl, whose expression I had thought so cruel when I heard her say: "Poor old man, I do feel so sorry for him," I saw gather and gleam a cordial, friendly smile, and she held out her hand. Her hair was golden, and not her hair only; for if her cheeks were pink and her eyes blue it was like the still roseate morning sky which sparkles everywhere with dazzling points of gold.

At once kindled by her flame, I said to myself that this was a child who when in love grew shy, that it was for my sake, from love for me that she had remained with us, despite Albertine's rebuffs, and that she must have rejoiced in the opportunity to confess to me at last, by that smiling, friendly gaze, that she would be as kind to me as she was terrible to other people. Doubtless she had noticed me on the beach, when I still knew nothing of her, and had been thinking of me ever since; perhaps it had been to win my admiration that she mocked at the old gentleman, and because she had not succeeded in getting to know me that on the following days she appeared so morose. From the hotel I had often seen her, in the evenings, walking by herself on the beach. Probably in the hope of meeting me. And now, hindered as much by Albertine's presence as she would have been by that of the whole band, she had evidently attached herself to us, braving the increasing coldness of her friend's attitude, only in the hope of outstaying her, of being left alone with me, when she might make an appointment with me for some time when she would find an excuse to slip away without either her family's or her friends' knowing that she had gone, and would meet me in some safe place before church or after golf. It was all the more difficult to see her because Andrée had quarrelled with her and now detested her. "I have put up far too long with her terrible dishonesty," she explained to me, "her baseness; I can't tell you all the vile insults she has heaped on me. I have stood it all because of the others. But her latest effort was really too much!" And she told me of some foolish thing that this girl had done, which might indeed have injurious consequences to Andrée herself.

But those private words promised me by Gisèle's confiding eyes for the moment when Albertine should have left us by ourselves, were destined never to be spoken, because after Albertine, stubbornly planted between us, had answered with increasing curtness, and finally had ceased to respond at all to her friend's remarks, Gisèle at length abandoned the attempt and turned back. I found fault with Albertine for having been so disagreeable. "It will teach her to be more careful how she behaves. She's not a bad kid, but she'd talk the head off a donkey. She's no business, either, to go poking her nose into everything. Why should she fasten herself on to us without being asked? In another minute, I'd have told her to go to blazes. Besides I can't stand her going about with her hair like that; it's such bad form." I gazed at Albertine's cheeks as she spoke, and asked myself what might be the perfume, the taste of them: this time they were not cool, but glowed with a uniform pink, violet-tinted, creamy, like certain roses whose petals have a waxy gloss. I felt a passionate longing for them such as one feels sometimes for a particular flower. "I hadn't noticed it," was all that I said. "You stared at her hard enough; anyone would have said you wanted to paint her portrait," she scolded, not at all softened by the fact that it was at herself that I was now staring so fixedly. "I don't believe you would care for her, all the same. She's not in the least a flirt. You like little girls who flirt with you, I know. Anyhow, she won't have another chance of fastening on to us and being sent about her business; she's going off to-day to Paris." "Are the rest of your friends going too?" "No; only she and 'Miss,' because she's got an exam. coming; she's got to stay at home and swot for it, poor kid. It's not much fun for her, I don't mind telling you. Of course, you may be set a good subject, you never know. But it's a tremendous risk. One girl I know was asked: *Describe an accident that you have witnessed.* That was a piece of luck. But I know another girl who got: *State which you would rather have as a friend, Alceste or Philinte.* I'm sure I should have dried up altogether! Apart from everything else, it's not a question to set to girls. Girls go about with other girls; they're not supposed to have gentlemen friends." (This announcement, which shewed that I had but little chance of being admitted to the companionship of the band, froze my blood.) "But in any case, supposing it was set to boys, what on earth would you expect them to say to a question like that? Several parents wrote to the *Gaulois*, to complain of the difficult questions that were being set. The joke of it is that in a collection of prize-winning essays they gave two which treated the question in absolutely opposite ways. You see, it all depends on which examiner you get. One would like you to say that Philinte was a flatterer and a scoundrel, the other that you couldn't help admiring Alceste, but that he was too cantankerous, and that as a friend you ought to choose Philinte. How can you expect a lot of unfortunate candidates to know what to say when the professors themselves can't make up their minds. But that's nothing. They get more difficult every year. Gisèle will want all her wits about her if she's to get through." I returned to the hotel. My grandmother was not there. I waited for her for some time; when at last she appeared, I begged her to allow me, in quite unexpected circumstances, to make an expedition which might keep me away for a couple of days. I had luncheon with her, ordered a carriage and drove to the station. Gisèle would shew no surprise at seeing me there. After we had changed at Doncières, in the Paris train, there would be a carriage with a corridor, along which, while the governess dozed, I should be able to lead Gisèle into dark corners, and make an appointment to meet her on my return to Paris, which I would then try to put forward to the earliest possible date. I would travel with her as far as Caen or Evreux, whichever she preferred, and would take the next train back to Balbec. And yet, what would she have thought of me had she known that I had hesitated for a long time between her and her friends, that quite as much as with her I had contemplated falling in love with Albertine, with the bright-eyed girl, with Rosemonde. I felt a pang of remorse now that a bond of mutual affection was going to unite me with Gisèle. I could, moreover, truthfully have assured her that Albertine no longer interested me. I had seen her that morning as she swerved aside, almost turning her back on me, to speak to Gisèle. On her head, which was bent sullenly over her bosom, the hair that grew at the back, different from and darker even than the rest, shone as though she had just been bathing. "Like a dying duck in a thunderstorm!" I thought to myself, this view of her hair having let into Albertine's body a soul entirely different from that implied hitherto by her glowing complexion and mysterious gaze. That shining cataract of hair at the back of her head had been for a moment or two all that I was able to see of her, and continued to be all that I saw in retrospect. Our memory is like a shop in the window of which is exposed now one, now another photograph of the same person. And as a rule the most recent exhibit remains for some time the only one to be seen. While the coachman whipped on his horse I sat there listening to the words of gratitude and affection which Gisèle was murmuring in my ear, born, all of them, of her friendly smile and outstretched hand, the fact being that in those periods of my life in which I was not actually, but desired to be in love, I carried in my mind not only an ideal form of beauty once seen, which I recognised at a glance in every passing stranger who kept far enough from me for her confused features to resist any attempt at identification, but also the moral phantom —ever ready to be incarnate—of the woman who was going to fall in love with me, to take up her cues in the amorous comedy which I had had written out in my mind from my earliest boyhood, and in which every nice girl seemed to me to be equally desirous of playing, provided that she had also some of the physical qualifications required. In this play, whoever the new star might be whom I invited to create or to revive the leading part, the plot, the incidents, the lines themselves preserved an unalterable form.

Within the next few days, in spite of the reluctance that Albertine had shewn from introducing me to them, I knew all the little band of that first afternoon (except Gisèle, whom, owing to a prolonged delay at the level crossing by the station and a change in the time-table, I had not succeeded in meeting on the train, which had been gone some minutes before I arrived, and to whom as it happened I never gave another thought), and two or three other girls as well to whom at my request they introduced me. And thus, my expectation of the pleasure which I should find in a new girl springing from another girl through whom I had come to know her, the latest was like one of those new varieties of rose which gardeners get by using first a rose of another kind. And as I passed from blossom to blossom along this flowery chain, the pleasure of knowing one that was different would send me back to her to whom I was indebted for it, with a gratitude in which desire was mingled fully as much as in my new expectation. Presently I was spending all my time among these girls.

Alas! in the freshest flower it is possible to discern those just perceptible signs which to the instructed mind indicate already what will be, by the desiccation or fructification of the flesh that is to-day in bloom, the ultimate form, immutable and already predestinate, of the autumnal seed. The eye rapturously follows a nose like a wavelet that deliciously curls the water's face at daybreak and seems not to move, to be capturable by the pencil, because the sea is so calm then that one does not notice its tidal flow. Human faces seem not to change while we are looking at them, because the revolution which they perform is too slow for us to perceive it. But we have only to see, by the side of any of those girls, her mother or her aunt, to realise the distance over which, obeying the gravitation of a type that is, generally speaking, deplorable, her features will have travelled in less than thirty years, and must continue to travel until the sunset hour, until her face, having vanished altogether below the horizon, catches the light no more. I knew that, as deep, as ineluctable as is their Jewish patriotism or Christian atavism in those who imagine themselves to be the most emancipated of their race, there dwelt beneath the rosy inflorescence of Albertine, Rosemonde, Andrée, unknown to themselves, held in reserve until the circumstances should arise, a coarse nose, a protruding jaw, a bust that would create a sensation when it appeared, but was actually in the wings, ready to "come on," just as it might be a burst of Dreyfusism, or clericalism, sudden, unforeseen, fatal, some patriotic, some feudal form of heroism emerging suddenly when the circumstances demand it from a nature anterior to that of the man himself, by means of which he thinks, lives, evolves, gains strength himself or dies, without ever being able to distinguish that nature from the successive phases which in turn he takes for it. Even mentally, we depend a great deal more than we think upon natural laws, and our mind possesses already, like some cryptogamous plant, every little peculiarity that we imagine ourselves to be selecting. For we can see only the derived ideas, without detecting the primary cause (Jewish blood, French birth or whatever it may be) that inevitably produced them, and which at a given moment we expose. And perhaps, while the former appear to us to be the result of deliberate thought, the latter that of an imprudent disregard for our own health, we take from our family, as the papilionaceae take the form of their seed, as well the ideas by which we live as the malady from which we shall die.

As on a plant whose flowers open at different seasons, I had seen, expressed in the form of old ladies, on this Balbec shore, those shrivelled seed-pods, those flabby tubers which my friends would one day be. But what matter? For the moment it was their flowering-time. And so when Mme. de Villeparisis asked me to drive with her I sought an excuse to be prevented. I never went to see Elstir unless accompanied by my new friends. I could not even spare an afternoon to go to Doncières, to pay the visit I had promised Saint-Loup. Social engagements, serious discussions, even a friendly conversation, had they usurped the place allotted to my walks with these girls, would have had the same effect on me as if, when the luncheon bell rang, I had been taken not to a table spread with food but to turn the pages of an album. The men, the youths, the women, old or mature, whose society we suppose that we shall enjoy, are borne by us only on an unsubstantial plane surface, because we are conscious of them only by visual perception restricted to its own limits; whereas it is as delegates from our other senses that our eyes dart towards young girls; the senses follow, one after another, in search of the various charms, fragrant, tactile, savoury, which they thus enjoy even without the aid of fingers and lips; and able, thanks to the art of transposition, the genius for synthesis in which desire excels, to reconstruct beneath the hue of cheeks or bosom the feel, the taste, the contact that is forbidden them, they give to these girls the same honeyed consistency as they create when they stand rifling the sweets of a rose-garden, or before a vine whose clusters their eyes alone devour.

If it rained, although the weather had no power to daunt Albertine, who was often to be seen in her waterproof spinning on her bicycle through the driving showers, we would spend the day in the Casino, where on such days it would have seemed to me impossible not to go. I had the greatest contempt for the young Ambresacs, who had never set foot in it. And I willingly joined my friends in playing tricks on the dancing master. As a rule we had to listen to admonition from the manager, or from some of his staff, usurping dictatorial powers, because my friends, even Andrée herself, whom on that account I had regarded when I first saw her as so dionysiac a creature, whereas in reality she was delicate, intellectual, and this year far from well, in spite of which her actions were controlled less by the state of her health than by the spirit of that age which overcomes every other consideration and confounds in a general gaiety the weak with the strong, could not enter the outer hall of the rooms without starting to run, jumping over all the chairs, sliding back along the floor, their balance maintained by a graceful poise of their outstretched arms, singing the while, mingling all the arts, in that first bloom of youth, in the manner of those poets of ancient days for whom the different 'kinds' were not yet separate, so that in an epic poem they would introduce rules of agriculture with theological doctrine.

This Andrée who had struck me when I first saw them as the coldest of them all, was infinitely more refined, more loving, more sensitive than Albertine, to whom she displayed the caressing, gentle affection of an elder sister. At the Casino she would come across the floor to sit down by me, and knew instinctively, unlike Albertine, to refuse my invitation to dance, or even, if I was tired, to give up the Casino and come to me instead at the hotel. She expressed her friendship for me, for Albertine, in terms which were evidence of the most exquisite understanding of the things of the heart, which may have been partly due to the state of her health. She had always a merry smile of excuse for the childish behaviour of Albertine, who expressed with a crude violence the irresistible temptation held out to her by the parties and picnics to which she had not the sense, like Andrée, resolutely to prefer staying and talking with me. When the time came for her to go off to a luncheon party at the golf-club, if we were all three together she would get ready to leave us, then, coming up to Andrée: "Well, Andrée, what are you waiting for now? You know we are lunching at the golf-club." "No; I'm going to stay and talk to him," replied Andrée, pointing to me. "But you know, Mme. Durieux invited you," cried Albertine, as if Andrée's intention to remain with me could be explained only by ignorance on her part where else and by whom she had been bidden. "Look here, my good girl, don't be such an idiot," Andrée chid her. Albertine did not insist, fearing a suggestion that she too should stay with me. She tossed her head. "Just as you like," was her answer, uttered in the tone one uses to an invalid whose self-indulgence is killing him by inches, "I must fly; I'm sure your watch is slow," and off she went. "She is a dear girl, but quite impossible," said Andrée, bathing her friend in a smile at once caressing and critical. If in this craze for amusement Albertine might be said to echo something of the old original Gilberte, that is because a certain similarity exists, although the type evolves, between all the women we love, a similarity that is due to the fixity of our own temperament, which it is that chooses them, eliminating all those who would not be at once our opposite and our complement, fitted that is to say to gratify our senses and to wring our heart. They are, these women, a product of our temperament, an image inversely projected, a negative of our sensibility. So that a novelist might, in relating the life of his hero, describe his successive love-affairs in almost exactly similar terms, and thereby give the impression not that he was repeating himself but that he was creating, since an artificial novelty is never so effective as a repetition that manages to suggest a fresh truth. He ought, moreover, to indicate in the character of the lover a variability which becomes apparent as the story moves into fresh regions, into different latitudes of life. And perhaps he would be stating yet another truth if while investing all the other persons of his story with distinct characters he refrained from giving any to the beloved. We understand the characters of people who do not interest us; how can we ever grasp that of a person who is an intimate part of our existence, whom after a little we no longer distinguish in any way from ourselves, whose motives provide us with an inexhaustible supply of anxious hypotheses which we perpetually reconstruct. Springing from somewhere beyond our understanding, our curiosity as to the woman whom we love overleaps the bounds of that woman's character, which we might if we chose but probably will not choose to stop and examine. The object of our uneasy investigation is something more essential than those details of character comparable to the tiny particles of epidermis whose varied combinations form the florid originality of human flesh. Our intuitive radiography pierces them, and the images which it photographs for us, so far from being those of any single face, present rather the joyless universality of a skeleton.

Andrée, being herself extremely rich while the other was penniless and an orphan, with real generosity lavished on Albertine the full benefit of her wealth. As for her feelings towards Gisèle, they were not quite what I had been led to suppose. News soon reached us of the young student, and when Albertine handed round the letter she had received, a letter intended by Gisèle to give an account of her journey and to report her safe arrival to the little band, pleading laziness as an excuse for not having written yet to the rest, I was surprised to hear Andrée (for I imagined an irreparable breach between them) say: "I shall write to her to-morrow, because if I wait for her to write I may have to wait for years, she's such a slacker." And, turning to myself, she added: "You saw nothing much in her, evidently; but she's a jolly nice girl, and besides I'm really very fond of her." From which I concluded that Andrée's quarrels were apt not to last very long.

Except on these rainy days, as we had always arranged to go on our bicycles along the cliffs, or on an excursion inland, an hour or so before it was time to start I would go upstairs to make myself smart and would complain if Françoise had not laid out all the things that I wanted. Now even in Paris she would proudly, angrily straighten a back which the years had begun to bend, at the first word of reproach, she so humble, she so modest and charming when her self-esteem was flattered. As this was the mainspring of her life: her satisfaction, her good humour were in direct ratio to the difficulty of the tasks imposed on her. Those which she had to perform at Balbec were so easy that she shewed almost all the time a discontent which was suddenly multiplied an hundredfold, with the addition of an ironic air of offended dignity when I complained, on my way down to join my friends, that my hat had not been brushed or my ties sorted. She who was capable of taking such endless pains, without in consequence assuming that she had done anything at all, on my simply remarking that a coat was not in its proper place, not only did she boast of the care with which she had "put it past sooner than let it go gathering the dust," but, paying a formal tribute to her own labours, lamented that it was little enough of a holiday that she was getting at Balbec, and that we would not find another person in the whole world who would consent to put up with such treatment. "I can't think how anyone can leave things lying about the way you do; you just try and get anyone else to find what you want in such a mix-up. The devil himself would give it up as a bad job." Or else she would adopt a regal mien, scorching me with her fiery glance, and preserve a silence that was broken as soon as she had fastened the door behind her and was outside in the passage, which would then reverberate with utterances which I guessed to be insulting, though they remained as indistinct as those of characters in a play whose opening lines are spoken in the wings, before they appear on the stage. And even if nothing was missing and Françoise was in a good temper, still she made herself quite intolerable when I was getting ready to go out with my friends. For, drawing upon a store of stale witticisms at their expense which, in my need to be talking about the girls, I had made in her hearing, she put on an air of being about to reveal to me things of which I should have known more than she had there been any truth in her statements, which there never was, Françoise having misunderstood what she had heard. She had, like most people, her own ways; a person is never like a straight highway, but surprises us with the strange, unavoidable windings of his course through life, by which, though some people may not notice them, we find it a perpetual annoyance to be stopped and hindered. Whenever I arrived at the stage of "Where is my hat?" or uttered the name of Andrée or Albertine, I was forced by Françoise to stray into endless and absurd side-tracks which greatly delayed my progress. So too when I asked her to cut me the sandwiches of cheese or salad, or sent her out for the cakes which I was to eat while we rested on the cliffs, sharing them with the girls, and which the girls "might very well have taken turns to provide, if they had not been so close," declared Françoise, to whose aid there came at such moments a whole heritage of atavistic peasant rapacity and coarseness, and for whom one would have said that the soul of her late enemy Eulalie had been broken into fragments and reincarnate, more attractively than it had ever been in Saint-Eloi's, in the charming bodies of my friends of the little band. I listened to these accusations with a dull fury at finding myself brought to a standstill at one of those places beyond which the well-trodden country path that was Françoise's character became impassable, though fortunately never for very long. Then, my hat or coat found and the sandwiches ready, I sailed out to find Albertine, Andrée, Rosemonde, and any others there might be, and on foot or on our bicycles we would start.

In the old days I should have preferred our excursion to be made in bad weather. For then I still looked to find in Balbec the 'Cimmerians' land,' and fine days were a thing that had no right to exist there, an intrusion of the vulgar summer of seaside holiday-makers into that ancient region swathed in eternal mist. But now, everything that I had hitherto despised, shut out of my field of vision, not only effects of sunlight upon sea and shore, but even the regattas, the race-meetings, I would have sought out with ardour, for the reason for which formerly I had wanted only stormy seas, which was that these were now associated in my mind, as the others had been, with an aesthetic idea. Because I had gone several times with my new friends to visit Elstir, and, on the days when the girls were there, what he had selected to shew us were drawings of pretty women in yachting dress, or else a sketch made on a race-course near Balbec. I had at first shyly admitted to Elstir that I had not felt inclined to go to the meetings that were being held there. "You were wrong," he told me, "it is such a pretty sight, and so well worth seeing. For one thing, that peculiar animal, the jockey, on whom so many eager eyes are fastened, who in the paddock there looks so grim, a colourless face between his brilliant jacket and cap, one body and soul with the prancing horse he rides, how interesting to analyse his professional movements, the bright splash of colour he makes, with the horse's coat blending in it, as they stream down the course. What a transformation of every visible object in that luminous vastness of a racecourse where one is constantly surprised by fresh lights and shades which one sees only there. How charming the women can look there, too! The first day's racing was quite delightful, and there were women there exquisitely dressed, in the misty light of a Dutch landscape, in which one could feel rising to cloud the sun itself the penetrating coldness of the water. Never have I seen women arriving in carriages, or standing with glasses to their eyes in so extraordinary a light, which was due, I suppose, to the moisture from the sea. I should simply have loved to paint it. I came home from the races quite mad, and so keen to get to work!" After which he became more enthusiastic still over the yacht-races, and I realised that regattas, social fixtures where well-dressed women might be seen bathed in the greenish light of a marine race-course, might be for a modern artist as interesting a subject as were the revels which they so loved to depict for a Veronese or Carpaccio. When I suggested this to Elstir, "Your comparison is all the more true," he replied, "since, from the position of the city in which they painted, those revels were to a great extent aquatic. Except that the beauty of the shipping in those days lay as a rule in its solidity, in the complication of its structure. They had water-tournaments, as we have here, held generally in honour of some Embassy, such as Carpaccio shews us in his *Legend of Saint Ursula*. The vessels were massive, built up like architecture, and seemed almost amphibious, like lesser Venices set in the heart of the greater, when, moored to the banks by hanging stages decked with crimson satin and Persian carpets, they bore their freight of ladies in cherry-red brocade and green damask close under the balconies incrusted with many-coloured marbles from which other ladies leaned to gaze at them, in gowns with black sleeves slashed with white, stitched with pearls or bordered with lace. You cannot tell where the land ends and the water begins, what is still the palace or already the vessel, the caravel, the galeas, the Bucintoro." Albertine had listened with the keenest interest to these details of costume, these visions of elegance that Elstir was describing to us. "Oh, I should so like to see that lace you speak of; it's so pretty, the Venice-point," she cried. "Besides, I should love to see Venice." "You may, perhaps, before very long, be able," Elstir informed her, "to gaze upon the marvellous stuffs which they used to wear. Hitherto one has seen them only in the works of the Venetian painters, or very rarely among the treasures of old churches, except now and then when a specimen has come into the sale-room. But I hear that a Venetian artist, called Fortuny, has recovered the secret of the craft, and that before many years have passed women will be able to walk abroad, and better still to sit at home in brocades as sumptuous as those that Venice adorned, for her patrician daughters, with patterns brought from the Orient. But I don't know that I should much care for that, that it wouldn't be too much of an anachronism for the women of to-day, even when they parade at regattas, for, to return to our modern pleasure-craft, the times have completely changed since 'Venice, Queen of the Adriatic.' The great charm of a yacht, of the furnishings of a yacht, of yachting dress, is their simplicity, as just things for the sea, and I do so love the sea. I must confess to you that I prefer the fashions of to-day to those of Veronese's and even of Carpaccio's time. What there is so attractive about our yachts—and the smaller yachts especially, I don't like the huge ones, they're too much like ships; yachts are like women's hats, you must keep within certain limits—is the unbroken surface, simple, gleaming, grey, which under a cloudy, leaden sky takes on a creamy softness. The cabin in which we live ought to make us think of a little café. And women's clothes on board a yacht are the same sort of thing; what really are charming are those light garments, uniformly white, of cloth or linen or nankeen or drill, which in the sunlight and against the blue of the sea shew up with as dazzling a whiteness as a spread sail. You very seldom see a woman, for that matter, who knows how to dress, and yet some of them are quite wonderful. At the races, Mlle. Léa had a little white hat and a little white sunshade, simply enchanting. I don't know what I wouldn't give for that little sunshade." I should have liked very much to know in what respect this little sunshade differed from any other, and for other reasons, reasons of feminine vanity, Albertine was still more curious. But, just as Françoise used to explain the excellence of her *soufflés* by "It's the way you do them," so here the difference lay in the cut. "It was," Elstir explained, "quite tiny, quite round, like a Chinese umbrella." I mentioned the sunshades carried by various ladies, but it was not like any of them. Elstir found them all quite hideous. A man of exquisite taste, singularly hard to please, he would isolate some minute detail which was the whole difference between what was worn by three-quarters of the women he saw, and horrified him, and a thing which enchanted him by its prettiness; and—in contrast to its effect on myself, whose mind any display of luxury at once sterilised—stimulated his desire to paint "so as to make something as attractive." "Here you see a young lady who has guessed what the hat and sunshade were like," he said to me, pointing to Albertine whose eyes shone with envy. "How I should love to be rich, to have a yacht!" she said to the painter. "I should come to you to tell me how to run it. What lovely trips I'd take. And what fun it would be to go to Cowes for the races. And a motor-car! Tell me, do you think the ladies' fashions for motoring pretty?" "No"; replied Elstir, "but that will come in time. You see, there are very few firms at present, one or two only, Callot—although they go in rather too freely for lace—Doucet, Cheruit, Paquin sometimes. The others are all horrible." "Then, is there a vast difference between a Callot dress and one from any ordinary shop?" I asked Albertine. "Why, an enormous difference, my little man! I beg your pardon! Only, alas! what you get for three hundred francs in an ordinary shop will cost two thousand there. But there can be no comparison; they look the same only to people who know nothing at all about it." "Quite so," put in Elstir; "though I should not go so far as to say that it is as profound as the difference between a statue from Rheims Cathedral and one from Saint-Augustin. By the way, talking of cathedrals," he went on, addressing himself exclusively to me, because what he was saying had reference to an earlier conversation in which the girls had not taken part, and which for that matter would not have interested them at all, "I spoke to you the other day of Balbec Church as a great cliff, a huge breakwater built of the stone of the country; now look at this"; he handed me a water-colour. "Look at these cliffs (it's a sketch I did close to here, at the Creuniers); don't these rocks remind you of a cathedral?" And indeed one would have taken them for soaring red arches. But, painted on a roasting hot day, they seemed to have crumbled into dust, made volatile by the heat which had drunk up half the sea, distilled over the whole surface of the picture almost into a gaseous state. On this day on which the sunlight had, so to speak, destroyed reality, reality concentrated itself in certain dusky and transparent creatures which, by contrast, gave a more striking, a closer impression of life: the shadows. Ravening after coolness, most of them, deserting the scorched open spaces, had fled for shelter to the foot of the rocks, out of reach of the sun; others, swimming gently upon the tide, like dolphins, kept close under the sides of the moving vessels, whose hulls they extended upon the pale surface of the water with their glossy blue forms. It was perhaps the thirst for coolness which they conveyed that did most to give me the sensation of the heat of this day and made me exclaim how much I regretted not knowing the Creuniers. Albertine and Andrée were positive that I must have been there hundreds of times. If so I had been there without knowing it, never suspecting that one day the sight of these rocks was to inspire me with such a thirst for beauty, not perhaps exactly natural beauty such as I had been seeking hitherto among the cliffs of Balbec, but rather architectural. Above all, I who, having come here to visit the kingdom of the storm, had never found, on any of my drives with Mme. de Villeparisis, when often we saw it only from afar, painted in a gap between the trees, the ocean sufficiently real, sufficiently liquid, giving a sufficient impression that it was hurling its massed forces against the shore, and would have liked to see it lie motionless only under a wintry shroud of fog, I could never have believed that I should now be dreaming of a sea which was nothing more than a whitish vapour that had lost both consistency and colour. But of such a sea Elstir, like the people who sat musing on board those vessels drowsy with the heat, had so intensely felt the enchantment that he had succeeded in transcribing, in fixing for all time upon the painted sheet the imperceptible reflux of the tide, the throb of one happy moment; and one suddenly became so enamoured, at the sight of this magic portrait, that one could think of nothing else than to range the world over, seeking to recapture the vanished day in its instantaneous, slumbering beauty.

So that if before these visits to Elstir, before I had set eyes on one of his sea-pictures in which a young woman in a dress of white serge or linen, on the deck of a yacht flying the American flag, had duplicated a white linen dress and coloured flag in my imagination which at once bred in me an insatiable desire to visit the spot and see there with my own eyes white linen dresses and flags against the sea, as though no such experience had ever yet befallen me, always until then I had taken care when I stood by the sea to expel from my field of vision, as well as the bathers in the foreground, the yachts with their too dazzling sails that were like seaside costumes, everything that prevented me from persuading myself that I was contemplating the immemorial flood of ocean which had been moving with the same mysterious life before the appearance of the human race; and had grudged even the days of radiant sunshine which seemed to me to invest with the trivial aspect of the world's universal summer this coast of fog and tempest, to mark simply an interruption, equivalent to what in music is known as a rest; now on the other hand it was the bad days that appeared to me to be some disastrous accident, a thing that could no longer find any place for itself in the world of beauty; I felt a keen desire to go out and recapture in reality what had so powerfully aroused my imagination, and I hoped that the weather would be propitious enough for me to see from the summit of the cliff the same blue shadows as were in Elstir's picture.

Nor, as I went along, did I still make a frame about my eyes with my hands as in the days when, conceiving nature to be animated by a life anterior to the first appearance of man, and inconsistent with all those wearisome perfections of industrial achievement which had hitherto made me yawn with boredom at Universal Exhibitions or in the milliners' windows, I endeavoured to include only that section of the sea over which there was no steamer passing, so that I might picture it to myself as immemorial, still contemporary with the ages in which it had been set apart from the land, or at least with the first dawn of life in Greece, which enabled me to repeat in their literal meaning the lines of 'Father Leconte' of which Bloch was so fond:

'Gone are the Kings, gone are their towering prows,
Vanished upon the raging deep, alas,
The long-haired warrior heroes of Hellas.'

I could no longer despise the milliners, now that Elstir had told me that the delicate touches by which they give a last refinement, a supreme caress to the ribbons or feathers of a hat after it is finished, would be as interesting to him to paint as the muscular action of the jockeys themselves (a statement which had delighted Albertine). But I must wait until I had returned—for milliners, to Paris—for regattas and races to Balbec, where there would be no more now until next year. Even a yacht with women in white linen garments was not to be found.

Often we encountered Bloch's sisters, to whom I was obliged to bow since I had dined with their father. My new friends did not know them. "I am not allowed to play with Israelites," Albertine explained. Her way of pronouncing the word—'Issraelites' instead of 'Izraelites'—would in itself have sufficed to shew, even if one had not heard the rest of the sentence, that it was no feeling of friendliness towards the chosen race that inspired these young Frenchwomen, brought up in God-fearing homes, and quite ready to believe that the Jews were in the habit of massacring Christian children. "Besides, they're shocking bad form, your friends," said Andrée with a smile which implied that she knew very well that they were no friends of mine. "Like everything to do with the tribe," went on Albertine, in the sententious tone of one who spoke from personal experience. To tell the truth, Bloch's sisters, at once overdressed and half naked, with their languishing, bold, blatant, sluttish air did not create the best impression. And one of their cousins, who was only fifteen, scandalised the Casino by her unconcealed admiration for Mlle. Léa, whose talent as an actress M. Bloch senior rated very high, but whose tastes were understood to lead her not exactly in the direction of the gentlemen.

Some days we took our refreshment at one of the outlying farms which catered to visitors. These were the farms known as Les Ecorres, Marie-Thérèse, La Croix d'Heuland, Bagatelle, Californie and Marie-Antoinette. It was the last that had been adopted by the little band.

But at other times, instead of going to a farm, we would climb to the highest point of the cliff, and, when we had reached it and were seated on the grass, would undo our parcel of sandwiches and cakes. My friends preferred the sandwiches, and were surprised to see me eat only a single chocolate cake, sugared with gothic tracery, or an apricot tart. This was because, with the sandwiches of cheese or of green-stuff, a form of food that was novel to me and knew nothing of the past, I had nothing in common. But the cakes understood, the tarts were gossips. There were in the former an insipid taste of cream, in the latter a fresh taste of fruit which knew all about Combray, and about Gilberte, not only the Gilberte of Combray but her too of Paris, at whose tea-parties I had found them again. They reminded me of those cake-plates of the Arabian Nights pattern, the subjects on which were such a distraction to my aunt Léonie when Françoise brought her up, one day, Aladdin or the Wonderful Lamp, another day Ali-Baba, or the Sleeper

Awakes, or Sinbad the Sailor embarking at Bassorah with all his treasure. I should dearly have liked to see them again, but my grandmother did not know what had become of them, and thought moreover that they were just common plates that had been bought in the village. No matter, in that grey, midland Combray scene they and their pictures were set like many-coloured jewels, as in the dark church were the windows with their shifting radiance, as in the dusk of my bedroom were the projections cast by the magic-lantern, as in the foreground of the view of the railway-station and the little local line the buttercups from the Indies and the Persian lilacs, as were my great-aunt's shelves of old porcelain in the sombre dwelling of an elderly lady in a country town.

Stretched out on the cliff I would see before me nothing but grassy meadows and beyond them not the seven heavens of the Christian cosmogony but two stages only, one of a deeper blue, the sea, and over it another more pale. We ate our food, and if I had brought with me also some little keepsake which might appeal to one or other of my friends, joy sprang with such sudden violence into her translucent face, flushed in an instant, that her lips had not the strength to hold it in, and to allow it to escape parted in a shout of laughter. They had gathered close round me, and between their faces which were almost touching one another the air that separated them traced azure pathways such as might have been cut by a gardener wishing to clear the ground a little so as to be able himself to move freely through a thicket of roses.

When we had finished eating we would play games which until then I should have thought boring, sometimes such childish games as King of the Castle, or Who Laughs First; not for a kingdom would I have renounced them now; the rosy dawn of adolescence, with which the faces of these girls were still aglow, and from which I, young as I was, had already emerged, shed its light on everything round about them and, like the fluid painting of some of the Primitives, brought out the most insignificant details of their daily lives in relief against a golden background. Even the faces of the girls were, for the most part, clouded with this misty effulgence of a dawn from which their actual features had not yet emerged. One saw only a charming sheet of colour beneath which what in a few years' time would be a profile was not discernible. The profile of to-day had nothing definite about it, and could be only a momentary resemblance to some deceased member of the family to whom nature had paid this commemorative courtesy. It comes so soon, the moment when there is nothing left to wait for, when the body is fixed in an immobility which holds no fresh surprise in store, when one loses all hope on seeing—as on a tree in the height of summer leaves already brown—round a face still young hair that is growing thin or turning grey; it is so short, that radiant morning time that one comes to like only the very youngest girls, those in whom the flesh, like a precious leaven, is still at work. They are no more yet than a stream of ductile matter, moulded ever afresh by the fleeting impression of the moment. You would say that each of them was in turn a little statuette of childish gaiety, of a child grown earnest, coaxing, surprised, taking its pattern from an expression frank and complete, but fugitive. This plasticity gives a wealth of variety and charm to the pretty attentions which a little girl pays to us. Of course, such attentions are indispensable in the woman also, and she whom we do not attract, or who fails to let us see that we have attracted her, tends to assume in our eyes a somewhat tedious uniformity. But even these pretty attentions, after a certain age, cease to send gentle ripples over a face which the struggle for existence has hardened, has rendered unalterably militant or ecstatic. One—owing to the prolonged strain of the obedience that subjects wife to husband—will seem not so much a woman's face as a soldier's; another, carved by the sacrifices which a mother has consented to make, day after day, for her children, will be the face of an apostle. A third is, after a stormy passage through the years, the face of an ancient mariner, upon a body of which its garments alone indicate the sex. Certainly the attentions that a woman pays us can still, so long as we are in love with her, scatter fresh charms over the hours that we spend in her company. But she is not then for us a series of different women. Her gaiety remains external to an unchanging face. Whereas adolescence is anterior to this complete solidification; and from this it follows that we feel, in the company of young girls, the refreshing sense that is afforded us by the spectacle of forms undergoing an incessant process of change, a play of unstable forces which makes us think of that perpetual re-creation of the primordial elements of nature which we contemplate when we stand by the sea.

It was not merely a social engagement, a drive with Mme. de Villeparisis, that I would have sacrificed to the 'Ferret' or 'Guessing Games' of my friends. More than once, Robert de Saint-Loup had sent word that, since I was not coming to see him at Doncières, he had applied for twenty-four hours' leave, which he would spend at Balbec. Each time I wrote back that he was on no account to come, offering the excuse that I should be obliged to be away myself that very day, when I had some duty call to pay with my grandmother on family friends in the neighbourhood. No doubt I fell in his estimation when he learned from his aunt in what the 'duty call' consisted, and who the persons were who combined to play the part of my grandmother. And yet I had not been wrong, perhaps, after all, in sacrificing not only the vain pleasures of the world but the real pleasure of friendship to that of spending the whole day in this green garden. People who enjoy the capacity—it is true that such people are artists, and I had long been convinced that I should never be that—are also under an obligation to live for themselves. And friendship is a dispensation from this duty, an abdication of self. Even conversation, which is the mode of expression of friendship, is a superficial digression which gives us no new acquisition. We may talk for a lifetime without doing more than indefinitely repeat the vacuity of a minute, whereas the march of thought in the solitary travail of artistic creation proceeds downwards, into the depths, in the only direction that is not closed to us, along which we are free to advance—though with more effort, it is true—towards a goal of truth. And friendship is not merely devoid of virtue, like conversation, it is fatal to us as well. For the sense of boredom which it is impossible not to feel in a friend's company (when, that is to say, we must remain exposed on the surface of our consciousness, instead of pursuing our voyage of discovery into the depths) for those of us in whom the law of development is purely internal—that first impression of boredom our friendship impels us to correct when we are alone again, to recall with emotion the words uttered by our friend, to look upon them as a valuable addition to our substance, albeit we are not like buildings to which stones can be added from without, but like trees which draw from their own sap the knot that duly appears on their trunks, the spreading roof of their foliage. I was lying to myself, I was interrupting the process of growth in that direction in which I could indeed really be enlarged and made happy, when I congratulated myself on being liked, admired, by so good, so clever, so rare a creature as Saint-Loup, when I focussed my mind, not upon my own obscure impressions which duty bade me unravel, but on the words uttered by my friend, in which, when I repeated them to myself—when I had them repeated to me by that other self who dwells in us and on to whom we are always so ready to transfer the burden of taking thought,—I strove to make myself find a beauty very different from that which I used to pursue in silence when I was really alone, but one that would enhance the merit of Robert, of myself, of my life. In the life which a friend like this provided for me, I seemed to myself to be comfortably preserved from solitude, nobly desirous of sacrificing myself for him, in fact quite incapable of realising myself. Among the girls, on the other hand, if the pleasure which I enjoyed was selfish, at least it was not based on the lie which seeks to make us believe that we are not irremediably alone, and which, when we talk to another person, prevents us from admitting that it is no longer we who speak, that we are fashioning ourselves in the likeness of strangers and not of our own ego, which is quite different from them. The words that passed between the girls of the little band and myself were not of any interest; they were, moreover, but few, broken by long spells of silence on my part. All of which did not prevent me from finding, in listening to them when they spoke to me, as much pleasure as in gazing at them, in discovering in the voice of each one of them a brightly coloured picture. It was with ecstasy that I caught their pipings. Love helps us to discern things, to discriminate. Standing in a wood, the lover of birds at once distinguishes the notes of the different species, which to ordinary people sound the same. The lover of girls knows that human voices vary even more. Each one possesses more notes than the richest instrument of music. And the combinations in which the voice groups those notes are as inexhaustible as the infinite variety of personalities. When I talked with any one of my friends I was conscious that the original, the unique portrait of her individuality had been skilfully traced, tyranically imposed on my mind as much by the inflexions of her voice as by those of her face, and that these were two separate spectacles which rendered, each in its own plane, the same single reality. No doubt the lines of the voice, like those of the face, were not yet definitely fixed; the voice had still to break, as the face to change. Just as children have a gland the secretion in which enables them to digest milk, a gland which is not found in grown men and women, so there were in the twitterings of these girls notes which women's voices no longer contain. And on this instrument with its greater compass they played with their lips, shewing all the application, the ardour of Bellini's little angel musicians, qualities which also are an exclusive appanage of youth. Later on these girls would lose that note of enthusiastic conviction which gave a charm to their simplest utterances, whether it were Albertine who, in a tone of authority, repeated puns to which the younger ones listened with admiration, until that wild impulse to laugh caught them all with the irresistible violence of a sneeze, or Andrée who began to speak of their work in the schoolroom, work even more childish seemingly than the games they played, with a gravity essentially puerile; and their words changed in tone, like the lyrics of ancient times when poetry, still hardly differentiated from music, was declaimed upon the different notes of a scale. In spite of which, the girls' voices already gave a quite clear indication of the attitude that each of these little people had adopted towards life, an attitude so personal that it would be speaking in far too general terms to say of one: "She treats everything as a joke," of another: "She jumps from assertion to assertion," of a third: "She lives in a state of expectant hesitation." The features of our face are hardly more than gestures which force of habit has made permanent. Nature, like the destruction of Pompeii, like the metamorphosis of a nymph into a tree, has arrested us in an accustomed movement. Similarly, our intonations embody our philosophy of life, what a person says to himself about things at any given moment. No doubt these peculiarities were to be found not only in the girls. They were those of their parents. The individual is a part of something that is more generally diffused than himself. By this reckoning, our parents furnish us not only with those habitual gestures which are the outlines of our face and voice, but also with certain mannerisms in speech, certain favourite expressions, which, almost as unconscious as an intonation, almost as profound, indicate likewise a definite point of view towards life. It is quite true, since we are speaking of girls, that there are certain of these expressions which their parents do not hand on to them until they have reached a certain age, as a rule not before they are women. These are kept in reserve. Thus, for instance, if you were to speak of the pictures of one of Elstir's friends, Andrèe, whose hair was still 'down,' could not yet make use, personally, of the expression which her mother and elder sister employed: "It appears, the man is quite charming!" But that would come in due course, when she was allowed to go to the Palais-Royal. And already, since her first communion, Albertine had begun to say, like a friend of her aunt: "I'm sure I should find that simply terrible!" She had also had given to her, as a little present, the habit of repeating whatever you had just been saying to her, so as to appear to be interested, and to be trying to form an opinion of her own. If you said that an artist's work was good, or his house nice, "Oh, his work is good, is it?" "Oh, his house is nice, is it?" Last of all, and even more general than the family heritage, was the rich layer imposed by the native province from which they derived their voices and of which indeed their intonations smacked. When Andrée sharply struck a solemn note she could not prevent the Perigordian string of her vocal instrument from giving back a resonant sound quite in harmony, moreover, with the Meridional purity of her features; while to the incessant pranks of Rosemonde the substance of her North-Country face and voice responded, whatever her mood at the time, in the accent of their province. Between that province and the temperament of the little girl who dictated these inflexions, I caught a charming dialogue. A dialogue, not in any sense a discord. It would not have been possible to separate the girl herself and her native place. She was herself; she was still it also. Moreover this reaction of locally procured materials on the genius who utilises them and to whose work their reaction imparts an added freshness, does not make the work any less individual, and whether it be that of an architect, a cabinet-maker or a composer, it reflects no less minutely the most subtle shades of the artist's personality, because he has been compelled to work in the millstone of Senlis or the red sandstone of Strasbourg, has respected the knots peculiar to the ash-tree, has borne in mind, when writing his score, the resources, the limitations, the volume of sound, the possibilities of flute or alto voice.

All this I realised, and yet we talked so little. Whereas with Mme. de Villeparisis or Saint-Loup I should have displayed by my words a great deal more pleasure than I should actually have felt, for I used always to be worn out when I parted from them; when, on the other hand, I was lying on the grass among all these girls, the plenitude of what I was feeling infinitely outweighed the paucity, the infrequency of our speech, and brimmed over from my immobility and silence in floods of happiness, the waves of which rippled up to die at the feet of these young roses.

For a convalescent who rests all day long in a flower-garden or orchard, a scent of flowers or fruit does not more completely pervade the thousand trifles that compose his idle hours than did for me that colour, that fragrance in search of which my eyes kept straying towards the girls, and the sweetness of which finally became incorporated in me. So it is that grapes grow sugary in sunshine. And by their slow continuity these simple little games had gradually wrought in me also, as in those who do nothing else all day but lie outstretched by the sea, breathing the salt air and growing sunburned, a relaxation, a blissful smile, a vague sense of dizziness that had spread from brain to eyes.

Now and then a pretty attention from one or another of them would stir in me vibrations which dissipated for a time my desire for the rest. Thus one day Albertine had suddenly asked: "Who has a pencil?" Andrée had provided one, Rosemonde the paper; Albertine had warned them: "Now, young ladies, you are not to look at what I write." After carefully tracing each letter, supporting the paper on her knee, she had passed it to me with: "Take care no one sees." Whereupon I had unfolded it and read her message, which was: "I love you."

"But we mustn't sit here scribbling nonsense," she cried, turning impetuously, with a sudden gravity of demeanour, to Andrée and Rosemonde. "I ought to shew you the letter I got from Gisèle this morning. What an idiot I am; I've had it all this time in my pocket—and you can't think how important it may be to us." Gisèle had been moved to copy out for her friend, so that it might be passed on to the others, the essay which she had written in her certificate examination. Albertine's fears as to the difficulty of the subjects set had been more than justified by the two from which Gisèle had had to choose. The first was: "Sophocles, from the Shades, writes to Racine to console him for the failure of *Athalie*"; the other: "Suppose that, after the first performance of *Esther*, Mme. de Sévigné is writing to Mme. de La Fayette to tell her how much she regretted her absence." Now Gisèle, in an excess of zeal which ought to have touched the examiners' hearts, had chosen the former, which was also the more difficult of the two subjects, and had handled it with such remarkable skill that she had been given fourteen marks, and had been congratulated by the board. She would have received her 'mention' if she had not 'dried up' in the Spanish paper. The essay, a copy of which Gisèle had now sent her, was immediately read aloud to us by Albertine, for, having presently to pass the same examination, she was anxious to have an opinion from Andrée, who was by far the cleverest of them all and might be able to give her some good 'tips.' "She did have a bit of luck!" was Albertine's comment. "It's the very subject her French mistress made her swot up while she was here." The letter from Sophocles to Racine, as drafted by Gisèle, ran as follows: "My dear friend, You must pardon me the liberty of addressing you when I have not the honour of your personal acquaintance, but your latest tragedy, *Athalie*, shews, does it not, that you have made the most thorough study of my own modest works. You have not only put poetry in the mouths of the protagonists, or principal persons of the drama, but you have written other, and, let me tell you without flattery, charming verses for the choruses, a feature which was not too bad, according to all one hears, in Greek Tragedy, but is a complete novelty in France. Nay more, your talent always so fluent, so finished, so winning, so fine, so delicate, has here acquired an energy on which I congratulate you. Athalie, Joad—these are figures which your rival Corneille could have wrought no better. The characters are virile, the plot simple and strong. You have given us a tragedy in which love is not the keynote, and on this I must offer you my sincerest compliments. The most familiar proverbs are not always the truest. I will give you an example:

> 'This passion treat, which makes the poet's art
> Fly, as on wings, straight to the listener's heart.'

You have shewn us that the religious sentiment in which your choruses are steeped is no less capable of moving us. The general public may have been puzzled at first, but those who are best qualified to judge must give you your due. I have felt myself impelled to offer you all my congratulations, to which I would add, my dear brother poet, an expression of my very highest esteem." Albertine's eyes, while she was reading this to us, had not ceased to sparkle. "Really, you'd think she must have cribbed it somewhere!" she exclaimed, as she reached the end. "I should never have believed that Gisèle could hatch out anything like as good! And the poetry she brings in! Where on earth can she have got that from?" Albertine's admiration, with a change, it is true, of object, but with no loss—an increase, rather—of intensity, combined with the closest attention to what was being said, continued to make her eyes 'start from her head' all the time that Andrée (consulted as being the biggest of the band and more knowledgeable than the others) first of all spoke of Gisèle's essay with a certain irony, then with a levity of tone which failed to conceal her underlying seriousness proceeded to reconstruct the letter in her own way. "It is not badly done," she told Albertine, "but if I were you and had the same subject set me, which is quite likely, as they do very often set that, I shouldn't do it in that way. This is how I would tackle it. Well, first of all, if I had been Gisèle, I should not have let myself get tied up, I should have begun by making a rough sketch of what I was going to write on a separate piece of paper. On the top line I should state the question and give an account of the subject, then the general ideas to be worked into the development. After that, appreciation, style, conclusion. In that way, with a summary to refer to, you know where you are. But at the very start, where she begins her account of the subject, or, if you like, Titine, since it's a letter we're speaking of, where she comes to the matter, Gisèle has gone off the rails altogether. Writing to a person of the seventeenth century, Sophocles ought never to have said, 'My dear friend.' " "Why, of course, she ought to have said, 'My dear Racine,' " came impetuously from Albertine. "That would have been much better." "No," replied Andrée, with a trace of mockery in her tone, "she ought to have put 'Sir.' In the same way, to end up, she ought to have thought of something like, 'Suffer me, Sir,' (at the very most, 'Dear Sir') to inform you of the sense of high esteem with which I have the honour to be your servant.' Then again, Gisèle says that the choruses in *Athalie* are a novelty. She is forgetting *Esther*, and two tragedies that are not much read now but happen to have been analysed this year by the Professor himself, so that you need only mention them, since he's got them on the brain, and you're bound to pass. I mean *Les Juives*, by Robert Garnier, and Montchrestien's *L'Aman*." Andrée quoted these titles without managing quite to conceal a secret sense of benevolent superiority, which found expression in a smile, quite a delightful smile, for that matter. Albertine could contain herself no longer. "Andrée, you really are a perfect marvel," she cried. "You must write down those names for me. Just fancy, what luck it would be if I got on to that, even in the oral, I should bring them in at once and make a colossal impression." But in the days that followed, every time that Albertine begged Andrée just to tell her again the names of those two plays so that she might write them down, her blue-stocking friend seemed most unfortunately to have forgotten them, and left her none the wiser. "And another thing," Andrée went on with the faintest note in her voice of scorn for companions so much younger than herself, though she relished their admiration and attached to the manner in which she herself would have composed the essay a greater importance than she wanted us to think, "Sophocles in the Shades must be kept well-informed of all that goes on. He must know, therefore, that it was not before the general public but before the King's Majesty and a few privileged courtiers that *Athalie* was first played. What Gisèle says in this connexion of the esteem of qualified judges is not at all bad, but she might have gone a little further. Sophocles, now that he is immortal, might quite well have the gift of prophecy and announce that, according to Voltaire, *Athalie* is to be the supreme achievement not of Racine merely but of the human mind." Albertine was drinking in every word. Her eyes blazed. And it was with the utmost indignation that she rejected Rosemonde's suggestion that they should begin to play. "And so," Andrée concluded, in the same easy, detached tone, blending a faint sneer with a certain warmth of conviction, "if Gisèle had noted down properly, first of all, the general ideas that she was going to develop, it might perhaps have occurred to her to do what I myself should have done, point out what a difference there is between the religious inspiration of Sophocles's choruses and Racine's. I should have made Sophocles remark that if Racine's choruses are instinct with religious feeling like those of the Greek Tragedians, the gods are not the same. The God of Joad has nothing in common with the god of Sophocles. And that brings us quite naturally, when we have finished developing the subject, to our conclusion: What does it matter if their beliefs are different? Sophocles would hesitate to insist upon such a point. He would be afraid of wounding Racine's convictions, and so, slipping in a few appropriate words on his masters at Port-Royal, he prefers to congratulate his disciple on the loftiness of his poetic genius."

Admiration and attention had so heated Albertine that great drops were rolling down her cheeks. Andrée preserved the unruffled calm of a female dandy. "It would not be a bad thing either to quote some of the opinions of famous critics," she added, before they began their game. "Yes," put in Albertine, "so I've been told. The best ones to quote, on the whole, are Sainte-Beuve and Merlet, aren't they?" "Well, you're not absolutely wrong," Andrée told her, "Merlet and Sainte-Beuve are by no means bad. But you certainly ought to mention Deltour and Gascq-Desfossés." She refused, however, despite Albertine's entreaties, to write down these two unfamiliar names.

Meanwhile I had been thinking of the little page torn from a scribbling block which Albertine had handed me. "I love you," she had written. And an hour later, as I scrambled down the paths which led back, a little too vertically for my liking, to Balbec, I said to myself that it was with her that I would have my romance.

The state of being indicated by the presence of all the signs by which we are accustomed to recognise that we are in love, such as the orders which I left in the hotel not to awaken me whoever might ask to see me, unless it were one or other of the girls, the beating of my heart while I waited for her (whichever of them it might be that I was expecting) and on those mornings my fury if I had not succeeded in finding a barber to shave me, and must appear with the disfigurement of a hairy chin before Albertine, Rosemonde or Andrée, no doubt this state, recurring indifferently at the thought of one or another, was as different from what we call love as is from human life the life of the zoophytes, where an existence, an individuality, if we may term it, is divided up among several organisms. But natural history teaches us that such an organization of animal life is indeed to be observed, and that our own life, provided only that we have outgrown the first phase, is no less positive as to the reality of states hitherto unsuspected by us, through which we have to pass, and can then abandon them altogether. Such was for me this state of love divided among several girls at once. Divided—say rather undivided, for more often than not what was so delicious to me, different from the rest of the world, what was beginning to become so precious to me that the hope of finding it again on the morrow was the greatest happiness in my life, was rather the whole of the group of girls, taken as they were all together on those afternoons on the cliffs, during those lifeless hours, upon that strip of grass on which were laid those forms, so exciting to my imagination, of Albertine, Rosemonde, Andrée; and that without my being able to say which of them it was that made those scenes so precious to me, which of them I was most anxious to love. At the start of a new love as at its ending, we are not exclusively attached to the object of that love, but rather the desire to be loving from which it will presently emerge (and, later on, the memory which it leaves behind) wanders voluptuously through a zone of interchangeable charms—simply natural charms, it may be, gratification of appetite, enjoyment of one's surroundings—which are so far harmonised among themselves that it does not in the presence of any one of them feel itself out of place. Besides, as my perception of them was not yet dulled by familiarity, I had still the faculty of seeing them, that is to say of feeling a profound astonishment every time that I found myself in their presence. No doubt this astonishment is to some extent due to the fact that the other person on such occasions presents himself in a fresh aspect; but so great is the multiformity of each of us, so abundant the wealth of lines of face and body, lines so few of which leave any trace, once we have parted from the other person, on the arbitrary simplicity of our memory. As our mind has selected some peculiarity that had struck us, has isolated it, exaggerated it, making of a woman who has appeared to us tall, a sketch in which her figure is absurdly elongated, or of a woman who has seemed to be pink-cheeked and golden-haired a pure 'Harmony in pink and gold,' so, the moment that woman is once again standing before us, all the other forgotten qualities which restore the balance of that one remembered feature at once assail us, in their confused complexity, diminishing her height, paling her cheeks, and substituting for what we have come to her solely to seek other peculiarities which we remember now that we did notice the first time, and fail to understand how we can so far have forgotten to look out for again. We thought we remembered; it was a peahen, surely; we go to see it and find a peony. And this inevitable astonishment is not the only one; for, side by side with it comes another, born of the difference, not now between the stereotyped forms of memory and reality, but between the person whom we saw last time and him who appears to us to-day from another angle and shews us another aspect. The human face is indeed, like the face of the God of some Oriental theogony, a whole cluster of faces, crowded together but on different surfaces so that one does not see them all at once.

But to a great extent our astonishment springs from the other person's presenting to us also a face that is the same as before. It would require so immense an effort to reconstruct everything that has been imparted to us by things other than ourselves—were it only the taste of a fruit—that no sooner is the impression received than we begin imperceptibly to descend the slope of memory and, without noticing anything, in a very short time, we have come a long way from what we actually felt. So that every fresh encounter is a sort of rectification, which brings us back to what we really did see. We have no longer any recollection of this, to such an extent does what we call remembering a person consist really in forgetting him. But so long as we can still see at the moment when the forgotten aspect appears, we recognise it, we are obliged to correct the straying line; thus the perpetual and fruitful surprise which made so salutary and invigorating for me these daily outings with the charming damsels of the sea shore, consisted fully as much in recognition as in discovery. When there is added to this the agitation aroused by what these girls were to me, which was never quite what I had supposed, and meant that my expectancy of our next meeting resembled not so much my expectancy the time before as the still throbbing memory of our latest conversation, it will be realised that each of our excursions made a violent interruption in the course of my thoughts and moved them clean out of the direction which, in the solitude of my own room, I had been able to trace for them at my leisure. That plotted course was forgotten, had ceased to exist, when I returned home buzzing like a hive of bees with remarks which had disquieted me when I heard them and were still echoing in my brain. The other person is destroyed when we cease to see him; after which his next appearance means a fresh creation of him, different from that which immediately preceded it, if not from them all. For the minimum variation that is to be found in these creations is duality. If we have in mind a strong and searching glance, a bold manner, it is inevitably, next time, by a half-languid profile, a sort of dreamy gentleness, overlooked by us in our previous impression, that we shall be, on meeting him again, astonished, that is to say almost solely struck. In confronting our memory with the new reality it is this that will mark the extent of our disappointment or surprise, will appear to us like the revised version of an earlier reality warning us that we had not remembered it correctly. In its turn, the facial aspect neglected the time before, and for that very reason the most striking this time, the most real, the most documentary, will become a matter for dreams and memories. It is a languorous and rounded profile, a gentle, dreamy expression which we shall now desire to see again. And then, next time, such resolution, such strength of character as there may be in the piercing eyes, the pointed nose, the tight lips, will come to correct the discrepancy between our desire and the object to which it has supposed itself to correspond. It is understood, of course, that this loyalty to the first and purely physical impressions which I formed afresh at each encounter with my friends did not involve only their facial appearance, since the reader has seen that I was sensible also of their voices, more disquieting still, perhaps (for not only does a voice offer the same strange and sensuous surfaces as a face, it issues from that unknown, inaccessible region the mere thought of which sets the mind swimming with unattainable kisses), their voices each like the unique sound of a little instrument into which the player put all her artistry and which was found only in her possession. Traced by a casual inflexion, a sudden deep chord in one of their voices would astonish me when I recognised after having forgotten it. So much so that the corrections which after every fresh meeting I was obliged to make so as to ensure absolute accuracy were as much those of a tuner or singing-master as a draughtsman's.

As for the harmonious cohesion in which had been neutralised for some time, by the resistance that each brought to bear against the expansion of the others, the several waves of sentiment set in motion in me by these girls, it was broken in Albertine's favour one afternoon when we were playing the game of 'ferret.' It was in a little wood on the cliff. Stationed between two girls, strangers to the little band, whom the band had brought in its train because we wanted that day to have a bigger party than usual, I gazed enviously at Albertine's neighbour, a young man, saying to myself that if I had been in his place I could have been touching my friend's hands all those miraculous moments which might perhaps never recur, and that this would have been but the first stage in a great advance. Already, by itself, and even without the consequences which it would probably have involved, the contact of Albertine's hands would have been delicious to me. Not that I had never seen prettier hands than hers. Even in the group of her friends, those of Andrée, slender hands and much more finely modelled, had as it were a private life of their own, obedient to the commands of their mistress, but independent, and used often to strain out before her like a leash of thoroughbred greyhounds, with lazy pauses, long dreams, sudden stretchings of a joint, seeing which Elstir had made a number of studies of these hands. And in one of them, in which you saw Andrée warming her hands at the fire, they had, with the light behind them, the gilded transparency of two autumn leaves. But, plumper than these, the hands of Albertine would yield for a moment, then resist the pressure of the hand that clasped them, giving a sensation that was quite peculiar to themselves. The act of pressing Albertine's hand had a sensual sweetness which was in keeping somehow with the rosy, almost mauve colouring of her skin. That pressure seemed to allow you to penetrate into the girl's being, to plumb the depths of her senses, like the ringing sound of her laughter, indecent as may be the cooing of doves or certain animal cries. She was the sort of woman with whom shaking hands affords so much pleasure that one feels grateful to civilisation for having made of the hand-clasp a lawful act between young men and girls when they meet. If the arbitrary code of good manners had replaced the clasp of hands by some other gesture, I should have gazed, day after day, at the unattainable hands of Albertine with a curiosity to know the feel of them as ardent as was my curiosity to learn the savour of her cheeks. But in the pleasure of holding her hand unrestrictedly in mine, had I been next to her at 'ferret' I did not envisage that pleasure alone; what avowals, declarations silenced hitherto by my bashfulness, I could have conveyed by certain pressures of hand on hand; on her side, how easy it would have been for her, in responding by other pressures, to shew me that she accepted; what complicity, what a vista of happiness stood open! My love would be able to make more advance in a few minutes spent thus by her side than it had yet made in all the time that I had known her. Feeling that they would last but a short time, were rapidly nearing their end, since presumably we were not going on much longer with this game, and that once it was over I should be too late, I could not keep in my place for another moment. I let myself deliberately be caught with the ring, and, having gone into the middle, when the ring passed I pretended not to see it but followed its course with my eyes, waiting for the moment when it should come into the hands of the young man next to Albertine, who herself, pealing with helpless laughter, and in the excitement and pleasure of the game, was blushing like a rose. "Why, we really are in the Fairy Wood!" said Andrée to me, pointing to the trees that grew all round, with a smile in her eyes which was meant only for me and seemed to pass over the heads of the other players, as though we two alone were clever enough to double our parts, and make, in connexion with the game we were playing, a remark of a poetic nature. She even carried the delicacy of her fancy so far as to sing half-unconsciously: "The Ferret of the Wood has passed this way, Sweet Ladies; he has passed by this way, the Ferret of Fairy Wood!" like those people who cannot visit Trianon without getting up a party in Louis XVI costume, or think in effective to have a song sung to its original setting. I should no doubt have been sorry that I could see no charm in this piece of mimicry, had I had time to think of it. But my thoughts were all elsewhere. The players began to shew surprise at my stupidity in never getting the ring. I was looking at Albertine, so pretty, so indifferent, so gay, who, though she little knew it, was to be my neighbour when at last I should catch the ring in the right hands, thanks to a stratagem which she did not suspect, and would certainly have resented if she had. In the heat of the game her long hair had become loosened, and fell in curling locks over her cheeks on which it served to intensify, by its dry brownness, the carnation pink. "You have the tresses of Laura Dianti, of Eleanor of Guyenne, and of her descendant so beloved of Chateaubriand. You ought always to wear your hair half down like that," I murmured in her ear as an excuse for drawing close to her. Suddenly the ring passed to her neighbour. I sprang upon him at once, forced open his hands and seized it; he was obliged now to take my place inside the circle, while I took his beside Albertine. A few minutes earlier I had been envying this young man, when I saw that his hands as they slipped over the cord were constantly brushing against hers. Now that my turn was come, too shy to seek, too much moved to enjoy this contact, I no longer felt anything save the rapid and painful beating of my heart. At one moment Albertine leaned towards me, with an air of connivance, her round and rosy face, making a show of having the ring, so as to deceive the ferret, and keep him from looking in the direction in which she was just going to pass it. I realised at once that this was the sole object of Albertine's mysterious, confidential gaze, but I was a little shocked to see thus kindle in her eyes the image—purely fictitious, invented to serve the needs of the game—of a secret, an understanding between her and myself which did not exist, but which from that moment seemed to me to be possible and would have been divinely sweet. While I was still being swept aloft by this thought, I felt a slight pressure of Albertine's hand against mine, and her caressing finger slip under my finger along the cord, and I saw her, at the same moment, give me a wink which she tried to make pass unperceived by the others. At once, a mass of hopes, invisible hitherto by myself, crystallised within me. "She is taking advantage of the game to let me feel that she really does love me," I thought to myself, in an acme of joy, from which no sooner had I reached it than I fell, on hearing Albertine mutter furiously: "Why can't you take it? I've been shoving it at you for the last hour." Stunned with grief, I let go the cord, the ferret saw that ring and swooped down on it, and I had to go back into the middle, where I stood helpless, in despair, looking at the unbridled rout which continued to circle round me, stung by the jeering shouts of all the players, obliged, in reply, to laugh when I had so little mind for laughter, while Albertine kept on repeating: "People can't play if they don't pay attention, and spoil the game for the others. He shan't be asked again when we're going to play, Andrée; if he is, I don't come." Andrée, with a mind above the game, still chanting her 'Fairy Wood' which, in a spirit of imitation, Rosemonde had taken up too, but without conviction, sought to make a diversion from Albertine's reproaches by saying to me: "We're quite close to those old Creuniers you wanted so much to see. Look, I'll take you there by a dear little path, and we'll leave these silly idiots to go on playing like babies in the nursery." As Andrée was extremely nice to me, as we went along I said to her everything about Albertine that seemed calculated to make me attractive to the latter. Andrée replied that she too was very fond of Albertine, thought her charming; in spite of which the compliments that I was paying to her friend did not seem altogether to please her. Suddenly, in the little sunken path, I stopped short, touched to the heart by an exquisite memory of my childhood. I had just recognised, by the fretted and glossy leaves which it thrust out towards me, a hawthorn-bush, flowerless, alas, now that spring was over. Around me floated the atmosphere of far-off Months of Mary, of Sunday afternoons, of beliefs, or errors long ago forgotten. I wanted to stay it in its passage. I stood still for a moment, and Andrée, with a charming divination of what was in my mind, left me to converse with the leaves of the bush. I asked them for news of the flowers, those hawthorn flowers that were like merry little girls, headstrong, provocative, pious. "The young ladies have been gone from here for a long time now," the leaves told me. And perhaps they thought that, for the great friend of those young ladies that I pretended to be, I seemed to have singularly little knowledge of their habits. A great friend, but one who had never been to see them again for all these years, despite his promises. And yet, as Gilberte had been my first love among girls, so these had been my first love among flowers. "Yes, I know all that, they leave about the middle of June," I answered, "but I am so delighted to see the place where they stayed when they were here. They came to see me, too, at Combray, in my room; my mother brought them when I was ill in bed. And we used to meet on Saturday evenings, too, at the Month of Mary devotions. Can they get to them from here?" "Oh, of course! Why, they make a special point of having our young ladies at Saint-Denis du Désert, the church near here." "Then, if I want to see them now?" "Oh, not before May, next year." "But I can be sure that they will be here?" "They come regularly every year." "Only I don't know whether it will be easy to find the place." "Oh, dear, yes! They are so gay, the young ladies, they stop laughing only to sing hymns together, so that you can't possibly miss them, you can tell by the scent from the other end of the path."

I caught up Andrée, and began again to sing Albertine's praises. It was inconceivable to me that she would not repeat what I said to her friend, seeing the emphasis that I put into it. And yet I never heard that Albertine had been told. Andrée had, nevertheless, a far greater understanding of the things of the heart, a refinement of nice behaviour; finding the look, the word, the action that could most ingeniously give pleasure, keeping to herself a remark that might possibly cause pain, making a sacrifice (and making it as though it were no sacrifice at all) of an afternoon's play, or it might be an 'at home' or a garden party in order to stay beside a friend who was feeling sad, and thus shew him or her that she preferred the simple company of a friend to frivolous pleasures; these were her habitual delicacies. But when one knew her a little better one would have said that it was with her as with those heroic cravens who wish not to be afraid, and whose bravery is especially meritorious, one would have said that in her true character there was none of that generosity which she displayed at every moment out of moral distinction, or sensibility, or a noble desire to shew herself a true friend. When I listened to all the charming things she was saying to me about a possible affection between Albertine and myself it seemed as though she were bound to do everything in her power to bring it to pass. Whereas, by mere chance perhaps, not even of the least of the various minor opportunities which were at her disposal and might have proved effective in uniting me to Albertine did she ever make any use, and I would not swear that my effort to make myself loved by Albertine did not—if not provoke in her friend secret stratagems destined to bring it to nought—at any rate arouse in her an anger which however she took good care to hide and against which even, in her delicacy of feeling, she may herself have fought. Of the countless refinements of goodness which Andrée shewed Albertine would have been incapable, and yet I was not certain of the underlying goodness of the former as I was to be, later on, of the latter's. Shewing herself always tenderly indulgent to the exuberant frivolity of Albertine, Andrée would greet her with speeches, with smiles which were those of a friend, better still, she always acted towards her as a friend. I have seen her, day after day, in order to give the benefit of her own wealth, to bring some happiness to this penniless friend take, without any possibility of advantage to herself, more pains than a courtier would take who sought to win his sovereign's favour. She was charmingly gentle always, charming in her choice of sweet, pathetic expressions, when you said to her what a pity it was that Albertine was so poor, and took infinitely more trouble on her behalf than she would have taken for a wealthy friend. But if anyone were to hint that Albertine was perhaps not quite so poor as people made out, a just discernible cloud would veil the light of Andrée's eyes and brow; she seemed out of temper. And if you went on to say that after all Albertine might perhaps be less difficult to marry off than people supposed, she would vehemently contradict you, repeating almost angrily: "Oh dear, no; she will never get married! I am quite certain of it; it is a dreadful worry to me!" In so far as I myself was concerned, Andrée was the only one of the girls who would never have repeated to me anything not very pleasant that might have been said about me by a third person; more than that, if it were I who told her what had been said she would make a pretence of not believing it, or would furnish some explanation which made the remark inoffensive; it is the aggregate of these qualities that goes by the name of tact. Tact is the attribute of those people who, if we have called a man out in a duel, congratulate us and add that there was no necessity, really; so as to enhance still further in our own eyes the courage of which we have given proof without having been forced to do so. They are the opposite of the people who, in similar circumstances, say: "It must have been a horrid nuisance for you, fighting a duel, but on the other hand you couldn't possibly swallow an insult like that, there was nothing else to be done." But as there is always something to be said on both sides, if the pleasure, or at least the indifference shewn by our friends in repeating something offensive that they have heard said about us, proves that they do not exactly put themselves in our skin at the moment of speaking, but thrust in the pin-point, turn the knife-blade as though it were gold-beater's skin and not human, the art of always keeping hidden from us what might be disagreeable to us in what they have heard said about our actions, or in the opinion which those actions have led the speakers themselves to form of us, proves that there is in the other kind of friends, in the friends who are so full of tact, a strong vein of dissimulation. It does no harm if indeed they are incapable of thinking evil, and if what is said by other people only makes them suffer as it would make us. I supposed this to be the case with Andrée, without, however, being absolutely sure.

We had left the little wood and had followed a network of overgrown paths through which Andrée managed to find her way with great skill. Suddenly, "Look now," she said to me, "there are your famous Creuniers, and, I say, you are in luck, it's just the time of day, and the light is the same as when Elstir painted them." But I was still too wretched at having fallen, during the game of 'ferret,' from such a pinnacle of hopes. And so it was not with the pleasure which otherwise I should doubtless have felt that I caught sight, almost below my feet, crouching among the rocks, where they had gone for protection from the heat, of marine goddesses for whom Elstir had lain in wait and surprised them there, beneath a dark glaze as lovely as Leonardo would have painted, the marvellous Shadows, sheltered and furtive, nimble and voiceless, ready at the first glimmer of light to slip behind the stone, to hide in a cranny, and prompt, once the menacing ray had passed, to return to rock or seaweed beneath the sun that crumbled the cliffs and the colourless ocean, over whose slumbers they seemed to be watching, motionless lightfoot guardians letting appear on the water's surface their viscous bodies and the attentive gaze of their deep blue eyes.

We went back to the wood to pick up the other girls and go home together. I knew now that I was in love with Albertine; but, alas! I had no thought of letting her know it. This was because, since the days of our games in the Champs-Elysées, my conception of love had become different, even if the persons to whom my love was successively assigned remained practically the same. For one thing, the avowal, the declaration of my passion to her whom I loved no longer seemed to me one of the vital and necessary incidents of love, nor love itself an external reality, but simply a subjective pleasure. And as for this pleasure, I felt that Albertine would do everything necessary to furnish it, all the more since she would not know that I was enjoying it.

As we walked home the image of Albertine, bathed in the light that streamed from the other girls, was not the only one that existed for me. But as the moon, which is no more than a tiny white cloud of a more definite and fixed shape than other clouds during the day, assumes her full power as soon as daylight dies, so when I was once more in the hotel it was Albertine's sole image that rose from my heart and began to shine. My room seemed to me to have become suddenly a new place. Of course, for a long time past, it had not been the hostile room of my first night in it. All our lives we go on patiently modifying the surroundings in which we dwell; and gradually, as habit dispenses us from feeling them, we suppress the noxious elements of colour, shape and smell which were at the root of our discomfort. Nor was it any longer the room, still potent enough over my sensibility, not certainly to make me suffer, but to give me joy, the fount of summer days, like a marble basin in which, half way up its polished sides, they mirrored an azure surface steeped in light over which glided for an instant, impalpable and white as a wave of heat, a shadowy and fleeting cloud; not the room, wholly aesthetic, of the pictorial evening hours; it was the room in which I had been now for so many days that I no longer saw it. And now I was just beginning again to open my eyes to it, but this time from the selfish angle which is that of love. I liked to feel that the fine big mirror across one corner, the handsome bookcases with their fronts of glass would give Albertine, if she came to see me, a good impression of myself. Instead of a place of transit in which I would stay for a few minutes before escaping to the beach or to Rivebelle, my room became real and dear to me, fashioned itself anew, for I looked at and appreciated each article of its furniture with the eyes of Albertine.

A few days after the game of 'ferret,' when, having allowed ourselves to wander rather too far afield, we had been fortunate in finding at Maineville a couple of little "tubs" with two seats in each which would enable us to be back in time for dinner, the keenness, already intense, of my love for Albertine, had the following effect, first of all, that it was Rosemonde and Andrée in turn that I invited to be my companion, and never once Albertine, after which, in spite of my manifest preference for Andrée or Rosemonde, I led everybody, by secondary considerations of time and distance, cloaks and so forth, to decide, as though against my wishes, that the most practical policy was that I should take Albertine, to whose company I pretended to resign myself for good or ill. Unfortunately, since love tends to the complete assimilation of another person, while other people are not comestible by way of conversation alone, Albertine might be (and indeed was) as friendly as possible to me on our way home; when I had deposited her at her own door she left me happy but more famished for her even than I had been at the start, and reckoning the moments that we had spent together as only a prelude, of little importance in itself, to those that were still to come. And yet this prelude had that initial charm which is not to be found again. I had not yet asked anything of Albertine. She could imagine what I wanted, but, not being certain of it, would suppose that I was tending only towards relations without any definite purpose, in which my friend would find that delicious vagueness, rich in surprising fulfilments of expectations, which is true romance.

In the week that followed I scarcely attempted to see Albertine. I made a show of preferring Andrée. Love is born; one would like to remain, for her whom one loves, the unknown whom she may love in turn, but one has need of her, one requires contact not so much with her body as with her attention, her heart. One slips into a letter some spiteful expression which will force the indifferent reader to ask for some little kindness in compensation, and love, following an unvarying procedure, sets going with an alternating movement the machinery in which one can no longer either refrain from loving or be loved. I gave to Andrée the hours spent by the others at a party which I knew that she would sacrifice for my sake, with pleasure, and would have sacrificed even with reluctance, from a moral nicety, so as not to let either the others or herself think that she attached any importance to a relatively frivolous amusement. I arranged in this way to have her entirely to myself every evening, meaning not to make Albertine jealous, but to improve my position in her eyes, or at any rate not to imperil it by letting Albertine know that it was herself and not Andrée that I loved. Nor did I confide this to Andrée either, lest she should repeat it to her friend. When I spoke of Albertine to Andrée I affected a coldness by which she was perhaps less deceived that I by her apparent credulity. She made a show of believing in my indifference to Albertine, of desiring the closest possible union between Albertine and myself. It is probable that, on the contrary, she neither believed in the one nor wished for the other. While I was saying to her that I did not care very greatly for her friend, I was thinking of one thing only, how to become acquainted with Mme. Bontemps, who was staying for a few days near Balbec, and to whom Albertine was going presently on a short visit. Naturally I did not let Andrée become aware of this desire, and when I spoke to her of Albertine's people, it was in the most careless manner possible. Andrée's direct answers did not appear to throw any doubt on my sincerity. Why then did she blurt out suddenly, about that time: "Oh, guess who' I've just seen—Albertine's aunt!" It is true that she had not said in so many words: "I could see through your casual remarks all right that the one thing you were really thinking of was how you could make friends with Albertine's aunt." But it was clearly to the presence in Andrée's mind of some such idea which she felt it more becoming to keep from me that the word 'just' seemed to point. It was of a kind with certain glances, certain gestures which, for all that they have not a form that is logical, rational, deliberately calculated to match the listener's intelligence, reach him nevertheless in their true significance, just as human speech, converted into electricity in the telephone, is turned into speech again when it strikes the ear. In order to remove from Andrée's mind the idea that I was interested in Mme. Bontemps, I spoke of her from that time onwards not only carelessly but with downright malice, saying that I had once met that idiot of a woman, and trusted I should never have that experience again. Whereas I was seeking by every means in my power to meet her.

I tried to induce Elstir (but without mentioning to anyone else that I had asked him) to speak to her about me and to bring us together. He promised to introduce me to her, though he seemed greatly surprised at my wishing it, for he regarded her as a contemptible woman, a born intriguer, as little interesting as she was disinterested. Reflecting that if I did see Mme. Bontemps, Andrée would be sure to hear of it sooner or later, I thought it best to warn her in advance. "The things one tries hardest to avoid are what one finds one cannot escape," I told her. "Nothing in the world could bore me so much as meeting Mme. Bontemps again, and yet I can't get out of it, Elstir has arranged to invite us together." "I have never doubted it for a single instant," exclaimed Andrée in a bitter tone, while her eyes, enlarged and altered by her annoyance, focussed themselves upon some invisible object. These words of Andrée's were not the most recent statement of a thought which might be expressed thus: "I know that you are in love with Albertine, and that you are working day and night to get in touch with her people." But they were the shapeless fragments, easily pieced together again by me, of some such thought which I had exploded by striking it, through the shield of Andrée's self-control. Like her 'just,' these words had no meaning save in the second degree, that is to say they were words of the sort which (rather than direct affirmatives) inspires in us respect or distrust for another person, and leads to a rupture.

If Andrée had not believed me when I told her that Albertine's relatives left me indifferent, that was because she thought that I was in love with Albertine. And probably she was none too happy in the thought.

She was generally present as a third party at my meetings with her friend. And yet there were days when I was to see Albertine by herself, days to which I looked forward with feverish impatience, which passed without bringing me any decisive result, without having, any of them, been that cardinal day whose part I immediately entrusted to the day that was to follow, which would prove no more apt to play it; thus there crumbled and collapsed, one after another, like waves of the sea, those peaks at once replaced by others.

About a month after the day on which we had played 'ferret' together, I learned that Albertine was going away next morning to spend a couple of days with Mme. Bontemps, and, since she would have to start early, was coming to sleep that night at the Grand Hotel, from which, by taking the omnibus, she would be able, without disturbing the friends with whom she was staying, to catch the first train in the morning. I mentioned this to Andrée. "I don't believe a word of it," she replied, with a look of annoyance. "Anyhow it won't help you at all, for I'm quite sure Albertine won't want to see you if she goes to the hotel by herself. It wouldn't be 'regulation,' " she added, employing an epithet which had recently come into favour with her, in the sense of 'what is done.' "I tell you this because I understand Albertine. What difference do you suppose it makes to me, whether you see her or not? Not the slightest, I can assure you!"

We were joined by Octave who had no hesitation in telling Andrée the number of strokes he had gone round in, the day before, at golf, then by Albertine, counting her diabolo as she walked along, like a nun telling her beads. Thanks to this pastime she could be left alone for hours on end without growing bored. As soon as she joined us I became conscious of the obstinate tip of her nose, which I had omitted from my mental pictures of her during the last few days; beneath her dark hair the vertical front of her brow controverted—and not for the first time—the indefinite image that I had preserved of her, while its whiteness made a vivid splash in my field of vision; emerging from the dust of memory, Albertine was built up afresh before my eyes. Golf gives one a taste for solitary pleasures. The pleasure to be derived from diabolo is undoubtedly one of these. And yet, after she had joined us, Albertine continued to toss up and catch her missile, just as a lady on whom friends have come to call does not on their account stop working at her crochet. "I hear that Mme. de Villeparisis," she remarked to Octave, "has been complaining to your father." I could hear, underlying the word, one of those notes that were peculiar to Albertine; always, just as I had made certain that I had forgotten them, I would be reminded of a glimpse caught through them before of Albertine's determined and typically Gallic mien. I might have been blind, and yet have detected certain of her qualities, alert and slightly provincial, from those notes, just as plainly as from the tip of her nose. These were equivalent and might have been substituted for one another, and her voice was like what we are promised in the photo-telephone of the future; the visual image was clearly outlined in the sound. "She's not written only to your father, either, she wrote to the Mayor of Balbec at the same time, to say that we must stop playing diabolo on the 'front' as somebody hit her in the face with one." "Yes, I was hearing about that. It's too silly. There's little enough to do here as it is." Andrée did not join in the conversation; she was not acquainted, any more than was Albertine or Octave, with Mme. de Villeparisis. She did, however, remark: "I can't think why this lady should make such a song about it. Old Mme. de Cambremer got hit in the face, and she never complained." "I will explain the difference," replied Octave gravely, striking a match as he spoke. "It's my belief that Mme. de Cambremer is a woman of the world, and Mme. de Villeparisis is just an upstart. Are you playing golf this afternoon?" And he left us, followed by Andrée. I was alone now with Albertine. "Do you see," she began, "I'm wearing my hair now the way you like—look at my ringlet. They all laugh at me and nobody knows who' I'm doing it for. My aunt will laugh at me too. But I shan't tell her why, either." I had a sidelong view of Albertine's cheeks, which often appeared pale, but, seen thus, were flushed with a coursing stream of blood which lighted them up, gave them that dazzling clearness which certain winter mornings have when the stones sparkling in the sun seem blocks of pink granite and radiate joy. The joy that I was drawing at this moment from the sight of Albertine's cheeks was equally keen, but led to another desire on my part, which was not to walk with her but to take her in my arms. I asked her if the report of her plans which I had heard were correct. "Yes," she told me, "I shall be sleeping at your hotel to-night, and in fact as I've got rather a chill, I shall be going to bed before dinner. You can come and sit by my bed and watch me eat, if you like, and afterwards we'll play at anything you choose. I should have liked you to come to the station to-morrow morning, but I'm afraid it might look rather odd, I don't say to Andrée, who is a sensible person, but to the others who will be there; if my aunt got to know, I should never hear the last of it. But we can spend the evening together, at any rate. My aunt will know nothing about that. I must go and say good-bye to Andrée. So long, then. Come early, so that we can have a nice long time together," she added, smiling. At these words I was swept back past the days in which I loved Gilberte to those in which love seemed to me not only an external entity but one that could be realised as a whole. Whereas the Gilberte whom I used to see in the Champs-Elysées was a different Gilberte from the one whom I found waiting inside myself when I was alone again, suddenly in the real Albertine, her whom I saw every day, whom I supposed to be stuffed with middle-class prejudices and entirely open with her aunt, there was incarnate the imaginary Albertine, she whom, when I still did not know her, I had suspected of casting furtive glances at myself on the 'front,' she who had worn an air of being reluctant to go indoors when she saw me making off in the other direction.

I went in to dinner with my grandmother. I felt within me a secret which she could never guess. Similarly with Albertine; to-morrow her friends would be with her, not knowing what novel experience she and I had in common; and when she kissed her niece on the brow Mme. Bontemps would never imagine that I stood between them, in that arrangement of Albertine's hair which had for its object, concealed from all the world, to give me pleasure, me who had until then so greatly envied Mme. Bontemps because, being related to the same people as her niece, she had the same occasions to don mourning, the same family visits to pay; and now I found myself meaning more to Albertine than did the aunt herself. When she was with her aunt, it was of me that she would be thinking. What was going to happen that evening, I scarcely knew. In any event, the Grand Hotel, the evening, would no longer seem empty to me; they contained my happiness. I rang for the lift-boy to take me up to the room which Albertine had engaged, a room that looked over the valley. The slightest movements, such as that of sitting down on the bench in the lift, were satisfying, because they were in direct relation to my heart; I saw in the ropes that drew the cage upwards, in the few steps that I had still to climb, only a materialisation of the machinery, the stages of my joy. I had only two or three steps to take now along the corridor before coming to that room in which was enshrined the precious substance of that rosy form—that room which, even if there were to be done in it delicious things, would keep that air of permanence, of being, to a chance visitor who knew nothing of its history, just like any other room, which makes of inanimate things the obstinately mute witnesses, the scrupulous confidants, the inviolable depositaries of our pleasure. Those few steps from the landing to Albertine's door, those few steps which no one now could prevent my taking, I took with delight, with prudence, as though plunged into a new and strange element, as if in going forward I had been gently displacing the liquid stream of happiness, and at the same time with a strange feeling of absolute power, and of entering at length into an inheritance which had belonged to me from all time. Then suddenly I reflected that it was wrong to be in any doubt; she had told me to come when she was in bed. It was as clear as daylight; I pranced for joy, I nearly knocked over Françoise who was standing in my way, I ran, with glowing eyes, towards my friend's room. I found Albertine in bed. Leaving her throat bare, her white nightgown altered the proportions of her face, which, flushed by being in bed or by her cold or by dinner, seemed pinker than before; I thought of the colours which I had had, a few hours earlier, displayed beside me, on the 'front,' the savour of which I was now at last to taste; her cheek was crossed obliquely by one of those long, dark, curling tresses, which, to please me, she had undone altogether. She looked at me and smiled. Beyond her, through the window, the valley lay bright beneath the moon. The sight of Albertine's bare throat, of those strangely vivid cheeks, had so intoxicated me (that is to say had placed the reality of the world for me no longer in nature, but in the torrent of my sensations which it was all I could do to keep within bounds), as to have destroyed the balance between the life, immense and indestructible, which circulated in my being, and the life of the universe, so puny in comparison. The sea, which was visible through the window as well as the valley, the swelling breasts of the first of the Maineville cliffs, the sky in which the moon had not yet climbed to the zenith, all of these seemed less than a featherweight on my eyeballs, which between their lids I could feel dilated, resisting, ready to bear very different burdens, all the mountains of the world upon their fragile surface. Their orbit no longer found even the sphere of the horizon adequate to fill it. And everything that nature could have brought me of life would have seemed wretchedly meagre, the sigh of the waves far too short a sound to express the enormous aspiration that was surging in my breast. I bent over Albertine to kiss her. Death might have struck me down in that moment; it would have seemed to me a trivial, or rather an impossible thing, for life was not outside, it was in me; I should have smiled pityingly had a philosopher then expressed the idea that some day, even some distant day, I should have to die, that the external forces of nature would survive me, the forces of that nature beneath whose godlike feet I was no more than a grain of dust; that, after me, there would still remain those rounded, swelling cliffs, that sea, that moonlight and that sky! How was that possible; how could the world last longer than myself, since it was it that was enclosed in me, in me whom it went a long way short of filling, in me, where, feeling that there was room to store so many other treasures, I flung contemptuously into a corner sky, sea and cliffs. "Stop that, or I'll ring the bell!" cried Albertine, seeing that I was flinging myself upon her to kiss her. But I reminded myself that it was not for no purpose that a girl made a young man come to her room in secret, arranging that her aunt should not know—that boldness, moreover, rewards those who know how to seize their opportunities; in the state of exaltation in which I was, the round face of Albertine, lighted by an inner flame, like the glass bowl of a lamp, started into such prominence that, copying the rotation of a burning sphere, it seemed to me to be turning, like those faces of Michelangelo which are being swept past in the arrested headlong flight of a whirlwind. I was going to learn the fragrance, the flavour which this strange pink fruit concealed. I heard a sound, precipitous, prolonged, shrill. Albertine had pulled the bell with all her might.

⁂

I had supposed that the love which I felt for Albertine was not based on the hope of carnal possession. And yet, when the lesson to be drawn from my experience that evening was, apparently, that such possession was impossible; when, after having had not the least doubt, that first day, on the beach, of Albertine's being unchaste, and having then passed through various intermediate assumptions, I seemed to have quite definitely reached the conclusion that she was absolutely virtuous; when, on her return from her aunt's, a week later, she greeted me coldly with: "I forgive you; in fact I'm sorry to have upset you, but you must never do it again,"—then, in contrast to what I had felt on learning from Bloch that one could always have all the women one liked, and as if, in place of a real girl, I had known a wax doll, it came to pass that gradually there detached itself from her my desire to penetrate into her life, to follow her through the places in which she had spent her childhood, to be initiated by her into the athletic life; my intellectual curiosity to know what were her thoughts on this subject or that did not survive my belief that I might take her in my arms if I chose. My dreams abandoned her, once they had ceased to be nourished by the hope of a possession of which I had supposed them to be independent. Thenceforward they found themselves once more at liberty to transmit themselves, according to the attraction that I had found in her on any particular day, above all according to the chances that I seemed to detect of my being, possibly, one day, loved by her—to one or another of Albertine's friends, and to Andrée first of all. And yet, if Albertine had not existed, perhaps I should not have had the pleasure which I began to feel more and more strongly during the days that followed in the kindness that was shewn me by Andrée. Albertine told no one of the check which I had received at her hands. She was one of those pretty girls who, from their earliest youth, by their beauty, but especially by an attraction, a charm which remains somewhat mysterious and has its source perhaps in reserves of vitality to which others less favoured by nature come to quench their thirst, have always—in their home circle, among their friends, in society—proved more attractive than other more beautiful and richer girls; she was one of those people from whom, before the age of love and ever so much more after it is reached, one asks more than they ask in return, more even than they are able to give. From her childhood Albertine had always had round her in an adoring circle four or five little girl friends, among them Andrée who was so far her superior and knew it (and perhaps this attraction which Albertine exerted quite involuntarily had been the origin, had laid the foundations of the little band). This attraction was still potent even at a great social distance, in circles quite brilliant in comparison, where if there was a pavane to be danced, they would send for Albertine rather than have it danced by another girl of better family. The consequence was that, not having a penny to her name, living a hard enough life, moreover, on the hands of M. Bontemps, who was said to be 'on the rocks,' and was anyhow anxious to be rid of her, she was nevertheless invited, not only to dine but to stay, by people who, in Saint-Loup's sight, might not have had any distinction, but to Rosemonde's mother or Andrée's, women who though very rich themselves did not know these other and richer people, represented something quite incalculable. Thus Albertine spent a few weeks every year with the family of one of the Governors of the Bank of France, who was also Chairman of the Board of Directors of a great Railway Company. The wife of this financier entertained people of importance, and had never mentioned her 'day' to Andrée's mother, who thought her wanting in politeness, but was nevertheless prodigiously interested in everything that went on in her house. Accordingly she encouraged Andrée every year to invite Albertine down to their villa, because, as she said, it was a real charity to offer a holiday by the sea to a girl who had not herself the means to travel and whose aunt did so little for her; Andrée's mother was probably not prompted by the thought that the banker and his wife, learning that Albertine was made much of by her and her daughter, would form a high opinion of them both; still less did she hope that Albertine, good and clever as she was, would manage to get her invited, or at least to get Andrée invited, to the financier's garden-parties. But every evening at the dinner-table, while she assumed an air of indifference slightly tinged with contempt, she was fascinated by Albertine's accounts of everything that had happened at the big house while she was staying there, and the names of the other guests, almost all of them people whom she knew by sight or by name. True, the thought that she knew them only in this indirect fashion, that is to say did not know them at all (she called this kind of acquaintance knowing people 'all my life'), gave Andrée's mother a touch of melancholy while she plied Albertine with questions about them in a lofty and distant tone, speaking with closed lips, and might have left her doubtful and uneasy as to the importance of her own social position had she not been able to reassure herself, to return safely to the 'realities of life,' by saying to the butler: "Please tell the chef that he has not made the peas soft enough." She then recovered her serenity. And she was quite determined that Andrée was to marry nobody but a man—of the best family, of course—rich enough for her too to be able to keep a chef and a couple of coachmen. This was the proof positive, the practical indication of 'position.' But the fact that Albertine had dined at the banker's house in the country with this or that great lady, and that the said great lady had invited the girl to stay with her next winter, did not invalidate a sort of special consideration which Albertine shewed towards Andrée's mother, which went very well with the pity, and even repulsion, excited by the tale of her misfortunes, a repulsion increased by the fact that M. Bontemps had proved a traitor to the cause (he was even, people said, vaguely Panamist) and had rallied to the Government. Not that this deterred Andrée's mother, in her passion for abstract truth, from withering with her scorn the people who appeared to believe that Albertine was of humble origin. "What's that you say? Why, they're one of the best families in the country. Simonet with a single 'n,' you know!" Certainly, in view of the class of society in which all this went on, in which money plays so important a part, and mere charm makes people ask you out but not marry you, a 'comfortable' marriage did not appear to be for Albertine a practical outcome of the so distinguished patronage which she enjoyed but which would not have been held to compensate for her poverty. But even by themselves, and with no prospect of any matrimonial consequence, Albertine's 'successes' in society excited the envy of certain spiteful mothers, furious at seeing her received like one of the family by the banker's wife, even by Andrée's mother, neither of whom they themselves really knew. They therefore went about telling common friends of those ladies and their own that both ladies would be very angry if they knew the facts, which were that Albertine repeated to each of them everything that the intimacy to which she was rashly admitted enabled her to spy out in the household of the other, a thousand little secrets which it must be infinitely unpleasant to the interested party to have made public. These envious women said this so that it might be repeated and might get Albertine into trouble with her patrons. But, as often happens, their machinations met with no success. The spite that prompted them was too apparent, and their only result was to make the women who had planned them appear rather more contemptible than before. Andrée's mother was too firm in her opinion of Albertine to change her mind about her now. She looked upon her as a 'poor wretch,' but the best-natured girl living, and one who would do anything in the world to give pleasure.

If this sort of select popularity to which Albertine had attained did not seem likely to lead to any practical result, it had stamped Andrée's friend with the distinctive marks of people who, being always sought after, have never any need to offer themselves, marks (to be found also, and for analogous reasons, at the other end of the social scale among the leaders of fashion) which consist in their not making any display of the successes they have scored, but rather keeping them to themselves. She would never say to anyone: "So-and-so is anxious to meet me," would speak of everyone with the greatest good nature, and as if it had been she who ran after, who sought to know other people, and not they. If you spoke of a young man who, a few minutes earlier, had been, in private conversation with her, heaping the bitterest reproaches upon her because she had refused him an assignation, so far from proclaiming this in public, or betraying any resentment she would stand up for him: "He is such a nice boy!" Indeed it quite annoyed her when she attracted people, because that compelled her to disappoint them, whereas her natural instinct was always to give pleasure. So much did she enjoy giving pleasure that she had come to employ a particular kind of falsehood, found among utilitarians and men who have 'arrived.' Existing besides in an embryonic state in a vast number of people, this form of insincerity consists in not being able to confine the pleasure arising out of a single act of politeness to a single person. For instance, if Albertine's aunt wished her niece to accompany her to a party which was not very lively, Albertine might have found it sufficient to extract from the incident the moral profit of having given pleasure to her aunt. But being courteously welcomed by her host and hostess, she thought it better to say to them that she had been wanting to see them for so long that she had finally seized this opportunity and begged her aunt to take her to their party. Even this was not enough: at the same party there happened to be one of Albertine's friends who was in great distress. "I did not like the idea of your being here by yourself. I thought it might do you good to have me with you. If you would rather come away from here, go somewhere else, I am ready to do anything you like; all I want is to see you look not so sad."—Which, as it happened, was true also. Sometimes it happened however that the fictitious object destroyed the real. Thus, Albertine, having a favour to ask on behalf of one of her friends, went on purpose to see a certain lady who could help her. But on arriving at the house of this lady—a kind and sympathetic soul—the girl, unconsciously following the principle of utilising a single action in a number of ways, felt it to be more ingratiating to appear to have come there solely on account of the pleasure she knew she would derive from seeing the lady again. The lady was deeply touched that Albertine should have taken a long journey purely out of friendship for herself. Seeing her almost overcome by emotion, Albertine began to like the lady still better. Only, there was this awkward consequence: she now felt so keenly the pleasure of friendship which she pretended to have been her motive in coming, that she was afraid of making the lady suspect the genuineness of sentiments which were actually quite sincere if she now asked her to do the favour, whatever it may have been, for her friend. The lady would think that Albertine had come for that purpose, which was true, but would conclude also that Albertine had no disinterested pleasure in seeing her, which was not. With the result that she came away without having asked the favour, like a man sometimes who has been so good to a woman, in the hope of winning her, that he refrains from declaring his passion in order to preserve for his goodness an air of nobility. In other instances it would be wrong to say that the true object was sacrificed to the subordinate and subsequently conceived idea, but the two were so far incompatible that if the person to whom Albertine endeared herself by stating the second had known of the existence of the first, his pleasure would at once have been turned into the deepest annoyance. At a much later point in this story, we shall have occasion to see this kind of incompatibility expressed in clearer terms. Let us say for the present, borrowing an example of a completely different order, that they occur very frequently in the most divergent situations that life has to offer. A husband has established his mistress in the town where he is quartered with his regiment. His wife, left by herself in Paris, and with an inkling of the truth, grows more and more miserable, and writes her husband letters embittered by jealousy. Very well; the mistress is obliged to go up to Paris for the day. The husband cannot resist her entreaties that he will go with her, and applies for short leave, which is granted. But as he is a good-natured fellow, and hates to make his wife unhappy, he goes to her and tells her, shedding a few quite genuine tears, that, driven to desperation by her letters, he has found the means of getting away from his duties to come to her, to console her in his arms. He has thus contrived by a single journey to furnish wife and mistress alike with proofs of his affection. But if the wife were to learn the reason for which he has come to Paris, her joy would doubtless be turned into grief, unless her pleasure in seeing the faithless wretch outweighed, in spite of everything, the pain that his infidelities had caused her. Among the men who have struck me as practising with most perseverance this system of what might be called killing any number of birds with one stone, must be included M. de Norpois. He would now and then agree to act as intermediary between two of his friends who had quarrelled, which led to his being called the most obliging of men. But it was not sufficient for him to appear to be doing a service to the friend who had come to him to demand it; he would represent to the other the steps which he was taking to effect a reconciliation as undertaken not at the request of the first friend but in the interest of the second, an attitude of the sincerity of which he had never any difficulty in convincing a listener already influenced by the idea that he saw before him the 'most serviceable of men.' In this fashion, playing in two scenes turn about, what in stage parlance is called 'doubling' two parts, he never allowed his influence to be in the slightest degree imperilled, and the services which he rendered constituted not an expenditure of capital but a dividend upon some part of his credit. At the same time every service, seemingly rendered twice over, correspondingly enhanced his reputation as an obliging friend, and, better still, a friend whose interventions were efficacious, one who did not draw bows at a venture, whose efforts were always justified by success, as was shewn by the gratitude of both parties. This duplicity in rendering services was—allowing for disappointments such as are the lot of every human being—an important element of M. de Norpois's character. And often at the Ministry he would make use of my father, who was a simple soul, while making him believe that it was he, M. de Norpois, who was being useful to my father.

Attracting people more easily than she wished, and having no need to proclaim her conquests abroad, Albertine kept silence with regard to the scene with myself by her bedside, which a plain girl would have wished the whole world to know. And yet of her attitude during that scene I could not arrive at any satisfactory explanation. Taking first of all the supposition that she was absolutely chaste (a supposition with which I had originally accounted for the violence with which Albertine had refused to let herself be taken in my arms and kissed, though it was by no means essential to my conception of the goodness, the fundamentally honourable character of my friend), I could not accept it without a copious revision of its terms. It ran so entirely counter to the hypothesis which I had constructed that day when I saw Albertine for the first time. Then ever so many different acts, all acts of kindness towards myself (a kindness that was caressing, at times uneasy, alarmed, jealous of my predilection for Andrée) came up on all sides to challenge the brutal gesture with which, to escape from me, she had pulled the bell. Why then had she invited me to come and spend the evening by her bedside? Why had she spoken all the time in the language of affection? What object is there in your desire to see a friend, in your fear that he is fonder of another of your friends than of you; why seek to give him pleasure, why tell him, so romantically, that the others will never know that he has spent the evening in your room, if you refuse him so simple a pleasure and if to you it is no pleasure at all? I could not believe, all the same, that Albertine's chastity was carried to such a pitch as that, and I had begun to ask myself whether her violence might not have been due to some reason of coquetry, a disagreeable odour, for instance, which she suspected of lingering about her person, and by which she was afraid that I might be disgusted, or else of cowardice, if for instance she imagined, in her ignorance of the facts of love, that my state of nervous exhaustion was due to something contagious, communicable to her in a kiss.

She was genuinely distressed by her failure to afford me pleasure, and gave me a little gold pencil-case, with that virtuous perversity which people shew who, moved by your supplications and yet not consenting to grant you what those supplications demand, are anxious all the same to bestow on you some mark of their affection; the critic, an article from whose pen would so gratify the novelist, asks him instead to dinner; the duchess does not take the snob with her to the theatre but lends him her box on an evening when she will not be using it herself. So far are those who do least for us, and might easily do nothing, driven by conscience to do something. I told Albertine that in giving me this pencil-case she was affording me great pleasure, and yet not so great as I should have felt if, on the night she had spent at the hotel, she had permitted me to embrace her. "It would have made me so happy; what possible harm could it have done you? I was simply astounded at your refusing to let me do it." "What astounds me," she retorted, "is that you should have thought it astounding. Funny sort of girls you must know if my behaviour surprises you." "I am extremely sorry if I annoyed you, but even now I cannot say that I think I was in the wrong. What I feel is that all that sort of thing is of no importance, really, and I can't understand a girl who could so easily give pleasure not consenting to do so. Let us be quite clear about it," I went on, throwing a sop of sorts to her moral scruples, as I recalled how she and her friends had scarified the girl who went about with the actress Léa. "I don't mean to say for a moment that a girl can behave exactly as she likes, or that there's no such thing as immorality. Take, let me see now, yes, what you were saying the other day about a girl who is staying at Balbec and her relations with an actress; I call that degrading, so degrading that I feel sure it must all have been made up by the girl's enemies, and that there can't be any truth in the story. It strikes me as improbable, impossible. But to let a friend kiss you, and go farther than that even—since you say that I am your friend . . ." "So you are, but I have had friends before now, I have known lots of young men who were every bit as friendly, I can assure you. There wasn't one of them would ever have dared to do a thing like that. They knew they'd get their ears boxed if they tried it on. Besides, they never dreamed of trying, we would shake hands in an open, friendly sort of way, like good pals, but there was never a word said about kissing, and yet we weren't any the less friends for that. Why, if it's my friendship you are after, you've nothing to complain of; I must be jolly fond of you to forgive you. But I'm sure you don't care two straws about me, really. Own up now, it's Andrée you're in love with. After all, you're quite right; she is ever so much prettier than I am, and perfectly charming! Oh! You men!" Despite my recent disappointment, these words so frankly uttered, by giving me a great respect for Albertine, made a very pleasant impression on me. And perhaps this impression was to have serious and vexatious consequences for me later on, for it was round it that there began to form that feeling almost of brotherly intimacy, that moral core which was always to remain at the heart of my love for Albertine. A feeling of this sort may be the cause of the keenest pain. For in order really to suffer at the hands of a woman one must have believed in her completely. For the moment, that embryo of moral esteem, of friendship, was left embedded in me like a stepping-stone in a stream. It could have availed nothing, by itself, against my happiness if it had remained there without growing, in an inertia which it was to retain the following year, and still more during the final weeks of this first visit to Balbec. It dwelt in me like one of those foreign bodies which it would be wiser when all is said to expel, but which we leave where they are without disturbing them, so harmless for the present does their weakness, their isolation amid a strange environment render them.

My dreams were now once more at liberty to concentrate on one or another of Albertine's friends, and returned first of all to Andrée, whose kindnesses might perhaps have appealed to me less strongly had I not been certain that they would come to Albertine's ears. Undoubtedly the preference that I had long been pretending to feel for Andrée had furnished me—in the habit of conversation with her, of declaring my affection—with, so to speak, the material, prepared and ready, for a love of her which had hitherto lacked only the complement of a genuine sentiment, and this my heart being once more free was now in a position to supply. But for me really to love Andrée, she was too intellectual, too neurotic, too sickly, too much like myself. If Albertine now seemed to me to be void of substance, Andrée was filled with something which I knew only too well. I had thought, that first day, that what I saw on the beach there was the mistress of some racing cyclist, passionately athletic; and now Andrée told me that if she had taken up athletic pastimes, it was under orders from her doctor, to cure her neurasthenia, her digestive troubles, but that her happiest hours were those which she spent in translating one of George Eliot's novels. The misunderstanding, due to an initial mistake as to what Andrée was, had not, as a matter of fact, the slightest importance. But my mistake was one of the kind which, if they allow love to be born, and are not recognised as mistakes until it has ceased to be under control, become a cause of suffering. Such mistakes—which may be quite different from mine with regard to Andrée, and even its exact opposite,—are frequently due (and this was especially the case here) to our paying too much attention to the aspect, the manners of what a person is not but would like to be, in forming our first impression of that person. To the outward appearance affectation, imitation, the longing to be admired, whether by the good or by the wicked, add misleading similarities of speech and gesture. These are cynicisms and cruelties which, when put to the test, prove no more genuine than certain apparent virtues and generosities. Just as we often discover a vain miser beneath the cloak of a man famed for his bountiful charity, so her flaunting of vice leads us to suppose a Messalina a respectable girl with middle-class prejudices. I had thought to find in Andrée a healthy, primitive creature, whereas she was merely a person in search of health, as were doubtless many of those in whom she herself had thought to find it, and who were in reality no more healthy than a burly arthritic with a red face and in white flannels is necessarily a Hercules. Now there are circumstances in which it is not immaterial to our happiness that the person whom we have loved because of what appeared to be so healthy about her is in reality only one of those invalids who receive such health as they possess from others, as the planets borrow their light, as certain bodies are only conductors of electricity.

No matter, Andrée, like Rosemonde and Gisèle, indeed more than they, was, when all was said, a friend of Albertine, sharing her life, imitating her conduct, so closely that, the first day, I had not at once distinguished them one from another. Over these girls, flowering sprays of roses whose principal charm was that they outlined themselves against the sea, the same undivided partnership prevailed as at the time when I did not know them, when the appearance of no matter which of them had caused me such violent emotion by its announcement that the little band was not far off. And even now the sight of one of them filled me with a pleasure into which there entered, to an extent which I should not have found it easy to define, the thought of seeing the others follow her in due course, and even if they did not come that day, speaking about them, and knowing that they would be told that I had been on the beach.

It was no longer simply the attraction of those first days, it was a regular love-longing which hesitated among them all, so far was each the natural substitute for the others. My bitterest grief would not have been to be thrown over by whichever of the girls I liked best, but I should at once have liked best, because I should have fastened on to her the whole of the melancholy dream which had been floating vaguely among them all, her who had thrown me over. It would, moreover, in that event, be the loss of all her friends, in whose eyes I should speedily have forfeited whatever advantage I might possess, that I should, in losing her, have unconsciously regretted, having vowed to them that sort of collective love which the politician and the actor feel for the public for whose desertion of them after they have enjoyed all its favours they can never be consoled. Even those favours which I had failed to win from Albertine I would hope suddenly to receive from one or other who had parted from me in the evening with a word or glance of ambiguous meaning, thanks to which it was to her that, for the next day or so, my desire would turn.

It strayed among them all the more voluptuously in that upon those volatile faces a comparative fixation of features had now begun, and had been carried far enough for the eye to distinguish—even if it were to change yet further—each malleable and floating effigy. To the differences that existed among them there was doubtless very little that corresponded in the no less marked differences in the length and breadth of those features, any of which might, perhaps, dissimilar as the girls appeared, almost have been lifted bodily from one face and imposed at random upon any other. But our knowledge of faces is not mathematical. In the first place, it does not begin with the measurement of the parts, it takes as its starting point an expression, a combination of the whole. In Andrée, for instance, the fineness of her gentle eyes seemed to go with the thinness of her nose, as slender as a mere curve which one could imagine as having been traced in order to produce along a single line the idea of delicacy divided higher up between the dual smile of her twin gaze. A line equally fine was engraved in her hair, pliant and deep as the line with which the wind furrows the sand. And in her it must have been hereditary; for the snow-white hair of Andrée's mother was driven in the same way, forming here a swelling, there a depression, like a snowdrift that rises or sinks according to the irregularities of the soil. Certainly, when compared with the fine delineation of Andrée's, Rosemonde's nose seemed to present broad surfaces, like a high tower raised upon massive foundations. Albeit expression suffices to make us believe in enormous differences between things that are separated by infinitely little—albeit that infinitely little may by itself create an expression that is absolutely unique, an individuality—it was not only the infinitely little of its lines and the originality of its expression that made each of these faces appear irreducible to terms of any other. Between my friends' faces their colouring established a separation wider still, not so much by the varied beauty of the tones with which it provided them, so contrasted that I felt when I looked at Rosemonde—flooded with a sulphurous rose colour, with the further contrast of the greenish light in her eyes—and then at Andrée—whose white cheeks received such an austere distinction from her black hair—the same kind of pleasure as if I had been looking alternately at a geranium growing by a sunlit sea and a camellia in the night; but principally because the infinitely little differences of their lines were enlarged out of all proportion, the relations between one and another surface entirely changed by this new element of colour which, in addition to being a dispenser of tints, is great at restoring, or rather at altering, dimensions. So that faces which were perhaps constructed on not dissimilar lines, according as they were lighted by the flaming torch of an auburn poll or high complexion, or by the white glimmer of a dull pallor, grew sharper or broader, became something else, like those properties used in the Russian ballet, consisting sometimes, when they are seen in the light of day, of a mere disc of paper, out of which the genius of a Bakst, according to the blood-red or moonlit effect in which he plunges his stage, makes a hard incrustation, like a turquoise on a palace well, or a swooning softness, as of a Bengal rose in an eastern garden. And so when acquiring a knowledge of faces we take careful measurements, but as painters, not as surveyors.

So it was with Albertine as with her friends. On certain days, slim, with grey cheeks, a sullen air, a violet transparency falling obliquely from her such as we notice sometimes on the sea, she seemed to be feeling the sorrows of exile. On other days her face, more sleek, caught and glued my desires to its varnished surface and prevented them from going any farther; unless I caught a sudden glimpse of her from the side, for her dull cheeks, like white wax on the surface, were visibly pink beneath, which made me anxious to kiss them, to reach that different tint which thus avoided my touch. At other times happiness bathed her cheeks with a clarity so mobile that the skin, grown fluid and vague, gave passage to a sort of stealthy and subcutaneous gaze, which made it appear to be of another colour but not of another substance than her eyes; sometimes, instinctively, when one looked at her face punctuated with tiny brown marks among which floated what were simply two larger, bluer stains, it was like looking at the egg of a goldfinch—or often like an opalescent agate cut and polished in two places only, where, from the heart of the brown stone, shone like the transparent wings of a sky-blue butterfly her eyes, those features in which the flesh becomes a mirror and gives us the illusion that it allows us, more than through the other parts of the body, to approach the soul. But most often of all she shewed more colour, and was then more animated; sometimes the only pink thing in her white face was the tip of her nose, as finely pointed as that of a mischievous kitten with which one would have liked to stop and play; sometimes her cheeks were so glossy that one's glance slipped, as over the surface of a miniature, over their pink enamel, which was made to appear still more delicate, more private, by the enclosing though half-opened case of her black hair; or it might happen that the tint of her cheeks had deepened to the violet shade of the red cyclamen, and, at times, even, when she was flushed or feverish, with a suggestion of unhealthiness which lowered my desire to something more sensual and made her glance expressive of something more perverse and unwholesome, to the deep purple of certain roses, a red that was almost black; and each of these Albertines was different, as in every fresh appearance of the dancer whose colours, form, character, are transmuted according to the innumerably varied play of a projected limelight. It was perhaps because they were so different, the persons whom I used to contemplate in her at this period, that later on I became myself a different person, corresponding to the particular Albertine to whom my thoughts had turned; a jealous, an indifferent, a voluptuous, a melancholy, a frenzied person, created anew not merely by the accident of what memory had risen to the surface, but in proportion also to the strength of the belief that was lent to the support of one and the same memory by the varying manner in which I appreciated it. For this is the point to which we must always return, to these beliefs with which most of the time we are quite unconsciously filled, but which for all that are of more importance to our happiness than is the average person whom we see, for it is through them that we see him, it is they that impart his momentary greatness to the person seen. To be quite accurate I ought to give a different name to each of the 'me's' who were to think about Albertine in time to come; I ought still more to give a different name to each of the Albertines who appeared before me, never the same, like—called by me simply and for the sake of convenience 'the sea'—those seas that succeeded one another on the beach, in front of which, a nymph likewise, she stood apart. But above all, in the same way as, in telling a story (though to far greater purpose here), one mentions what the weather was like on such and such a day, I ought always to give its name to the belief that, on any given day on which I saw Albertine, was reigning in my soul, creating its atmosphere, the appearance of people like that of seas being dependent on those clouds, themselves barely visible, which change the colour of everything by their concentration, their mobility, their dissemination, their flight—like that cloud which Elstir had rent one evening by not introducing me to these girls, with whom he had stopped to talk, whereupon their forms, as they moved away, had suddenly increased in beauty—a cloud that had formed again a few days later when I did get to know the girls, veiling their brightness, interposing itself frequently between my eyes and them, opaque and soft, like Virgil's Leucothea.

No doubt, all their faces had assumed quite new meanings for me since the manner in which they were to be read had been to some extent indicated to me by their talk, talk to which I could ascribe a value all the greater in that, by questioning them, I could prompt it whenever I chose, could vary it like an experimenter who seeks by corroborative proofs to establish the truth of his theory. And it is, after all, as good a way as any of solving the problem of existence to approach near enough to the things that have appeared to us from a distance to be beautiful and mysterious, to be able to satisfy ourselves that they have neither mystery nor beauty. It is one of the systems of hygiene among which we are at liberty to choose our own, a system which is perhaps not to be recommended too strongly, but it gives us a certain tranquillity with which to spend what remains of life, and also—since it enables us to regret nothing, by assuring us that we have attained to the best, and that the best was nothing out of the common—with which to resign ourselves to death.

I had now substituted, in the brains of these girls, for their supposed contempt for chastity, their memories of daily 'incidents,' honest principles, liable, it might be, to relaxation, but principles which had hitherto kept unscathed the children who had acquired them in their own respectable homes. And yet, when one has been mistaken from the start, even in trifling details, when an error of assumption or recollection makes one seek for the author of a malicious slander, or for the place where one has lost something, in the wrong direction, it frequently happens that one discovers one's error only to substitute for it not the truth but a fresh error. I drew, so far as their manner of life and the proper way to behave with them went, all the possible conclusions from the word 'Innocence' which I had read, in talking familiarly with them, upon their faces. But perhaps I had been reading carelessly, with the inaccuracy born of a too rapid deciphering, and it was no more written there than was the name of Jules Ferry on the programme of the performance at which I had heard Berma for the first time, an omission which had not prevented me from maintaining to M. de

Norpois that Jules Ferry, beyond any possibility of doubt, was a person who wrote curtain-raisers.

No matter which it might be of my friends of the little band, was not inevitably the face that I had last seen the only face that I could recall, since, of our memories with respect to a person, the mind eliminates everything that does not agree with our immediate purpose of our daily relations (especially if those relations are quickened with an element of love which, ever unsatisfied, lives always in the moment that is about to come)? That purpose allows the chain of spent days to slip away, holding on only to the very end of it, often of a quite different metal from the links that have vanished in the night, and in the journey which we make through life, counts as real only in the place in which we at any given moment are. But all those earliest impressions, already so remote, could not find, against the blunting process that assailed them day after day, any remedy in my memory; during the long hours which I spent in talking, eating, playing with these girls, I did not remember even that they were the same ruthless, sensual virgins whom I had seen, as in a fresco, file past between me and the sea.

Geographers, archaeologists may conduct us over Calypso's island, may excavate the Palace of Minos. Only Calypso becomes then nothing more than a woman, Minos than a king with no semblance of divinity. Even the good and bad qualities which history teaches us to have been the attributes of those quite real personages, often differ widely from those which we had ascribed to the fabulous beings who bore the same names as they. Thus had there faded and vanished all the lovely mythology of Ocean which I had composed in those first days. But it is not altogether immaterial that we do succeed, at any rate now and then, in spending our time in familiar intercourse with what we have thought to be unattainable and have longed to possess. In our later dealings with people whom at first we found disagreeable there persists always, even among the artificial pleasure which we have come at length to enjoy in their society, the lingering taint of the defects which they have succeeded in hiding. But, in relations such as I was now having with Albertine and her friends, the genuine pleasure which was there at the start leaves that fragrance which no amount of skill can impart to hot-house fruits, to grapes that have not ripened in the sun. The supernatural creatures which for a little time they had been to me still introduced, even without any intention on my part, a miraculous element into the most commonplace dealings that I might have with them, or rather prevented such dealings from ever becoming commonplace at all. My desire had sought so ardently to learn the significance of the eyes which now knew and smiled to see me, but whose glances on the first day had crossed mine like rays from another universe; it had distributed so generously, so carefully, so minutely, colour and fragrance over the carnation surfaces of these girls who now, outstretched on the cliff-top, were simply offering me sandwiches or guessing riddles, that often, in the afternoon, while I lay there among them, like those painters who seek to match the grandeurs of antiquity in modern life, give to a woman cutting her toe-nail the nobility of the *Spinario*, or, like Rubens, make goddesses out of women whom they know, to people some mythological scene; at those lovely forms, dark and fair, so dissimilar in type, scattered around me in the grass, I would gaze without emptying them, perhaps, of all the mediocre contents with which my everyday experience had filled them, and at the same time without expressly recalling their heavenly origin, as if, like young Hercules or young Telemachus, I had been set to play amid a band of nymphs.

Then the concerts ended, the bad weather began, my friends left Balbec; not all at once, like the swallows, but all in the same week. Albertine was the first to go, abruptly, without any of her friends understanding, then or afterwards, why she had returned suddenly to Paris whither neither her work nor any amusement summoned her. "She said neither why nor wherefore, and with that she left!" muttered Françoise, who, for that matter, would have liked us to leave as well. We were, she thought, inconsiderate towards the staff, now greatly reduced in number, but retained on account of the few visitors who were still staying on, and towards the manager who was 'just eating up money.' It was true that the hotel, which would very soon be closed for the winter, had long since seen most of its patrons depart, but never had it been so attractive. This view was not shared by the manager; from end to end of the rooms in which we sat shivering, and and at the doors of which no page now stood on guard, he paced the corridors, wearing a new frock coat, so well tended by the hairdresser that his insipid face appeared to be made of some composition in which, for one part of flesh, there were three of cosmetics, incessantly changing his neckties. (These refinements cost less than having the place heated and keeping on the staff, just as a man who is no longer able to subscribe ten thousand francs to a charity can still parade his generosity without inconvenience to himself by tipping the boy who brings him a telegram with five.) He appeared to be inspecting the empty air, to be seeking to give, by the smartness of his personal appearance, a provisional splendour to the desolation that could now be felt in this hotel where the season had not been good, and walked like the ghost of a monarch who returns to haunt the ruins of what was once his palace. He was particularly annoyed when the little local railway company, finding the supply of passengers inadequate, discontinued its trains until the following spring. "What is lacking here," said the manager, "is the means of commotion." In spite of the deficit which his books shewed, he was making plans for the future on a lavish scale. And as he was, after all, capable of retaining an exact memory of fine language when it was directly applicable to the hotel-keeping industry and had the effect of enhancing its importance: "I was not adequately supported, although in the dining room I had an efficient squad," he explained; "but the pages left something to be desired. You will see, next year, what a phalanx I shall collect." In the meantime the suspension of the services of the B. C. B. obliged him to send for letters and occasionally to dispatch visitors in a light cart. I would often ask leave to sit by the driver, and in this way I managed to be out in all weathers, as in the winter that I had spent at Combray.

Sometimes, however, the driving rain kept my grandmother and me, the Casino being closed, in rooms almost completely deserted, as in the lowest hold of a ship when a storm is raging; and there, day by day, as in the course of a sea-voyage, a new person from among those in whose company we had spent three months without getting to know them, the chief magistrate from Caen, the leader of the Cherbourg bar, an American lady and her daughters, came up to us, started conversation, discovered some way of making the time pass less slowly, revealed some social accomplishment, taught us a new game, invited us to drink tea or to listen to music, to meet them at a certain hour, to plan together some of those diversions which contain the true secret of pleasure-giving, which is to aim not at giving pleasure but simply at helping us to pass the time of our boredom, in a word, formed with us, at the end of our stay at Balbec, ties of friendship which, in a day or two, their successive departures from the place would sever. I even made the acquaintance of the rich young man, of one of his pair of aristocratic friends and of the actress, who had reappeared for a few days; but their little society was composed now of three persons only, the other friend having returned to Paris. They asked me to come out to dinner with them at their restaurant. I think, they were just as well pleased that I did not accept. But they had given the invitation in the most friendly way imaginable, and albeit it came actually from the rich young man, since the others were only his guests, as the friend who was staying with him, the Marquis Maurice de Vaudémont, came of a very good family indeed, instinctively the actress, in asking me whether I would not come, said, to flatter my vanity: "Maurice will be so pleased."

And when in the hall of the hotel I met them all three together, it was M. de Vaudémont (the rich young man effacing himself) who said to me: "Won't you give us the pleasure of dining with us?"

On the whole I had derived very little benefit from Balbec, but this only strengthened my desire to return there. It seemed to me that I had not stayed there long enough. This was not what my friends at home were thinking, who wrote to ask whether I meant to stay there for the rest of my life. And when I saw that it was the name 'Balbec' which they were obliged to put on the envelope—just as my window looked out not over a landscape or a street but on to the plains of the sea, as I heard through the night its murmur to which I had before going to sleep entrusted my ship of dreams, I had the illusion that this life of promiscuity with the waves must effectively, without my knowledge, pervade me with the notion of their charm, like those lessons which one learns by heart while one is asleep.

The manager offered to reserve better rooms for me next year, but I had now become attached to mine, into which I went without ever noticing the scent of flowering grasses, while my mind, which had once found such difficulty in rising to fill its space had come now to take its measurements so exactly that I was obliged to submit it to a reverse process when I had to sleep in Paris, in my own room, the ceiling of which was low.

It was high time, indeed, to leave Balbec, for the cold and damp had become too penetrating for us to stay any longer in a hotel which had neither fireplaces in the rooms nor a central furnace. Moreover, I forgot almost immediately these last weeks of our stay. What my mind's eye did almost invariably see when I thought of Balbec were the hours which, every morning during the fine weather, as I was going out in the afternoon with Albertine and her friends, my grandmother, following the doctor's orders, insisted on my spending lying down, with the room darkened. The manager gave instructions that no noise was to be made on my landing, and came up himself to see that they were obeyed. Because the light outside was so strong, I kept drawn for as long as possible the big violet curtains which had adopted so hostile an attitude towards me the first evening. But as, in spite of the pins with which, so that the light should not enter, Françoise fastened them every night, pins which she alone knew how to unfasten; as in spite of the rugs, the red cretonne table-cover, the various fabrics collected here and there which she fitted in to her defensive scheme, she never succeeded in making them meet exactly, the darkness was not complete, and they allowed to spill over the carpet as it were a scarlet shower of anemone-petals, among which I could not resist the temptation to plunge my bare feet for a moment. And on the wall which faced the window and so was partially lighted, a cylinder of gold with no visible support was placed vertically and moved slowly along like the pillar of fire which went before the Hebrews in the desert. I went back to bed; obliged to taste without moving, in imagination only, and all at once, the pleasures of games, bathing, walks which the morning prompted, joy made my heart beat thunderingly like a machine set going at full speed but fixed to the ground, which can spend its energy only by turning upon its own axis.

I knew that my friends were on the 'front,' but I did not see them as they passed before the links of the sea's uneven chain, far at the back of which, and nestling amid its bluish peaks like an Italian citadel, one could occasionally, in a clear moment, make out the little town of Rivebelle, drawn in minutest detail by the sun. I did not see my friends, but (while there mounted to my belvedere the shout of the newsboy, the 'journalists' as Françoise used to call them, the shouts of the bathers and of children at play, punctuating like the cries of sea-birds the sound of the gently breaking waves) I guessed their presence, I heard their laughter enveloped like the laughter of the Nereids in the smooth tide of sound that rose to my ears. "We looked up," said Albertine in the evening, "to see if you were coming down. But your shutters were still closed when the concert began." At ten o'clock, sure enough, it broke out beneath my windows. In the intervals in the blare of the instruments, if the tide were high, would begin again, slurred and continuous, the gliding surge of a wave which seemed to enfold the notes of the violin in its crystal spirals and to be spraying its foam over echoes of a submarine music. I grew impatient because no one had yet come with my things, so that I might rise and dress. Twelve o'clock struck, Françoise arrived at last. And for months on end, in this Balbec to which I had so looked forward because I imagined it only as battered by the storm and buried in fogs, the weather had been so dazzling and so unchanging that when she came to open the window I could always, without once being wrong, expect to see the same patch of sunlight folded in the corner of the outer wall, of an unalterable colour which was less moving as a sign of summer than depressing as the colour of a lifeless and composed enamel. And after Françoise had removed her pins from the mouldings of the window-frame, taken down her various cloths, and drawn back the curtains, the summer day which she disclosed seemed as dead, as immemorially ancient as would have been a sumptuously attired dynastic mummy from which our old servant had done no more than precautionally unwind the linen wrappings before displaying it to my gaze, embalmed in its vesture of gold.

The Guermantes Way

* * *

CONTENTS

Part I

PAGE

Chapter One *Names of People: The Duchesse de Guermantes—Saint-Loup at Doncières—Mme. de Villeparisis at home—My grandmother's illness.* 719

Part II

Chapter One (continued) *My grandmother's illness (continued)—Bergotte's illness—The Duke and the Doctor—Decline and death of my grandmother.* 940

Chapter Two *A visit from Albertine—Prospect of rich brides for certain friends of Saint-Loup—The wit of the Guermantes, as displayed before the Princesse de Parme—A strange visit to M. de Charlus—His character puzzles me more and more—The red shoes of the Duchess.* 965

The French text of Le Côté de Guermantes *being extremely inaccurate, every care has been taken to correct it in the process of translation. In three places in this volume the sequence of paragraphs has been altered, as the reader may discover by comparing the French and English texts.*

AUTHOR'S DEDICATION

A

LEON DAUDET

A l'auteur
du VOYAGE DE SHAKESPEARE,
du PARTAGE DE L'ENFANT,
de L'ASTRE NOIR,
de FANTOMES ET VIVANTS,
du MONDE DES IMAGES,
de tant de chefs-d'oeuvre,
A l'incomparable ami
en temoignage
de reconnaissance et d'admiration
M. P.

TRANSLATOR'S DEDICATION

To

MRS. H——,

on her Birthday

OBERON, in the ATHENIAN glade,
Reduced by deft TITANIA's power,
Invented arts for NATURE's aid
And from a snowflake shaped a flower:
NATURE, to outdo him, wrought of human clay
A fairy blossom, which we acclaim to-day.

HEBE, to high OLYMPUS borne,
Undoomed to death, by age uncurst,
XERES and PORTO, night and morn,
Let flow, to appease celestial thirst:
Ev'n so, untouched by years that envious pass
YOUTH greets the guests to-night and fills the glass.

HESIONE, for monstrous feast,
Against a rock was chained, to die;
Young HERCLES came, he slew the beast,
Nor won the award of chivalry:
E. S. P. H., whom monsters hold in awe,
Shield thee from injury, and enforce the law!

C. K. S. M.

The Guermantes Way

PART I

CHAPTER ONE

THE DUCHESSE DE GUERMANTES

THE twittering of the birds at daybreak sounded insipid to Françoise. Every word uttered by the maids upstairs made her jump; disturbed by all their running about, she kept asking herself what they could be doing. In other words, we had moved. Certainly the servants had made no less noise in the attics of our old home; but she knew them, she had made of their comings and goings familiar events. Now she faced even silence with a strained attention. And as our new neighbourhood appeared to be as quiet as the boulevard on to which we had hitherto looked had been noisy, the song (distinct at a distance, when it was still quite faint, like an orchestral *motif*) of a passer-by brought tears to the eyes of a Françoise in exile. And so if I had been tempted to laugh at her in her misery at having to leave a house in which she was 'so well respected on all sides' and had packed her trunks with tears, according to the Use of Combray, declaring superior to all possible houses that which had been ours, on the other hand I, who found it as hard to assimilate new as I found it easy to abandon old conditions, I felt myself drawn towards our old servant when I saw that this installation of herself in a building where she had not received from the hall-porter, who did not yet know us, the marks of respect necessary to her moral wellbeing, had brought her positively to the verge of dissolution. She alone could understand what I was feeling; certainly her young footman was not the person to do so; for him, who was as unlike the Combray type as it was possible to conceive, packing up, moving, living in another district, were all like taking a holiday in which the novelty of one's surroundings gave one the same sense of refreshment as if one had actually travelled; he thought he was in the country; and a cold in the head afforded him, as though he had been sitting in a draughty railway carriage, the delicious sensation of having seen the world; at each fresh sneeze he rejoiced that he had found so smart a place, having always longed to be with people who travelled a lot. And so, without giving him a thought, I went straight to Françoise, who, in return for my having laughed at her tears over a removal which had left me cold, now shewed an icy indifference to my sorrow, but because she shared it. The 'sensibility' claimed by neurotic people is matched by their egotism; they cannot abide the flaunting by others of the sufferings to which they pay an ever increasing attention in themselves. Françoise, who would not allow the least of her own ailments to pass unnoticed, if I were in pain would turn her head from me so that I should not have the satisfaction of seeing my sufferings pitied, or so much as observed. It was the same as soon as I tried to speak to her about our new house. Moreover, having been obliged, a day or two later, to return to the house we had just left, to retrieve some clothes which had been overlooked in our removal, while I, as a result of it, had still a 'temperature,' and like a boa constrictor that has just swallowed an ox felt myself painfully distended by the sight of a long trunk which my eyes had still to digest, Françoise, with true feminine inconstancy, came back saying that she had really thought she would stifle on our old boulevard, it was so stuffy, that she had found it quite a day's journey to get there, that never had she seen such stairs, that she would not go back to live there for a king's ransom, not if you were to offer her millions—a pure hypothesis—and that everything (everything, that is to say, to do with the kitchen and 'usual offices') was much better fitted up in the new house. Which, it is high time now that the reader should be told—and told also that we had moved into it because my grandmother, not having been at all well (though we took care to keep this reason from her), was in need of better air—was a flat forming part of the Hôtel de Guermantes.

At the age when a Name, offering us an image of the unknowable which we have poured into its mould, while at the same moment it connotes for us also an existing place, forces us accordingly to identify one with the other to such a point that we set out to seek in a city for a soul which it cannot embody but which we have no longer the power to expel from the sound of its name, it is not only to towns and rivers that names give an individuality, as do allegorical paintings, it is not only the physical universe which they pattern with differences, people with marvels, there is the social universe also; and so every historic house, in town or country, has its lady or its fairy, as every forest has its spirit, as there is a nymph for every stream. Sometimes, hidden in the heart of its name, the fairy is transformed to suit the life of our imagination by which she lives; thus it was that the atmosphere in which Mme. de Guermantes existed in me, after having been for years no more than the shadow cast by a magic lantern slide or the light falling through a painted window, began to let its colours fade when quite other dreams impregnated it with the bubbling coolness of her flowing streams.

And yet the fairy must perish if we come in contact with the real person to whom her name corresponds, for that person the name then begins to reflect, and she has in her nothing of the fairy; the fairy may revive if we remove ourself from the person, but if we remain in her presence the fairy definitely dies and with her the name, as happened to the family of Lusignan, which was fated to become extinct on the day when the fairy Mélusine should disappear. Then the Name, beneath our successive 'restorations' of which we may end by finding, as their original, the beautiful portrait of a strange lady whom we are never to meet, is nothing more than the mere photograph, for identification, to which we refer in order to decide whether we know, whether or not we ought to bow to a person who passes us in the street. But let a sensation from a bygone year—like those recording instruments which preserve the sound and the manner of the various artists who have sung or played into them—enable our memory to make us hear that name with the particular ring with which it then sounded in our ears, then, while the name itself has apparently not changed, we feel the distance that separates the dreams which at different times its same syllables have meant to us. For a moment, from the clear echo of its warbling in some distant spring, we can extract, as from the little tubes which we use in painting, the exact, forgotten, mysterious, fresh tint of the days which we had believed ourself to be recalling, when, like a bad painter, we were giving to the whole of our past, spread out on the same canvas, the tones, conventional and all alike, of our unprompted memory. Whereas on the contrary, each of the moments that composed it employed, for an original creation, in a matchless harmony, the colour of those days which we no longer know, and which, for that matter, will still suddenly enrapture me if by any chance the name 'Guermantes,' resuming for a moment, after all these years, the sound, so different from its sound to-day, which it had for me on the day of Mlle. Percepied's marriage, brings back to me that mauve—so delicate, almost too bright, too new—with which the billowy scarf of the young Duchess glowed, and, like two periwinkle flowers, growing beyond reach and blossoming now again, her two eyes, sunlit with an azure smile. And the name Guermantes of those days is also like one of those little balloons which have been filled with oxygen, or some such gas; when I come to explode it, to make it emit what it contains, I breathe the air of the Combray of that year, of that day, mingled with a fragrance of hawthorn blossom blown by the wind from the corner of the square, harbinger of rain, which now sent the sun packing, now let him spread himself over the red woollen carpet to the sacristy, steeping it in a bright geranium scarlet, with that, so to speak, Wagnerian harmony in its gaiety which makes the wedding service always impressive. But even apart from rare moments such as these, in which suddenly we feel the original entity quiver and resume its form, carve itself out of the syllables now soundless, dead; if, in the giddy rush of daily life, in which they serve only the most practical purposes, names have lost all their colour, like a prismatic top that spins too quickly and seems only grey, when, on the other hand, in our musings we reflect, we seek, so as to return to the past, to slacken, to suspend the perpetual motion by which we are borne along, gradually we see once more appear, side by side, but entirely distinct from one another, the tints which in the course of our existence have been successively presented to us by a single name.

What form was assumed in my mind by this name Guermantes when my first nurse—knowing no more, probably, than I know to-day in whose honour it had been composed—sang me to sleep with that old ditty, *Gloire à la Marquise de Guermantes,* or when, some years later, the veteran

Maréchal de Guermantes, making my nursery-maid's bosom swell with pride, stopped in the Champs-Elysées to remark: "A fine child, that!" and gave me a chocolate drop from his comfit-box, I cannot, of course, now say. Those years of my earliest childhood are no longer a part of myself; they are external to me; I can learn nothing of them save—as we learn things that happened before we were born—from the accounts given me by other people. But more recently I find in the period of that name's occupation of me seven or eight different shapes which it has successively assumed; the earliest were the most beautiful; gradually my musings, forced by reality to abandon a position that was no longer tenable, established themselves anew in one slightly less advanced until they were obliged to retire still farther. And, with Mme. de Guermantes, was transformed simultaneously her dwelling, itself also the offspring of that name, fertilised from year to year by some word or other that came to my ears and modulated the tone of my musings; that dwelling of hers reflected them in its very stones, which had turned to mirrors, like the surface of a cloud or of a lake. A dungeon keep without mass, no more indeed than a band of orange light from the summit of which the lord and his lady dealt out life and death to their vassals, had given place—right at the end of that 'Guermantes way' along which, on so many summer afternoons, I retraced with my parents the course of the Vivonne—to that land of bubbling streams where the Duchess taught me to fish for trout and to know the names of the flowers whose red and purple clusters adorned the walls of the neighbouring gardens; then it had been the ancient heritage, famous in song and story, from which the proud race of Guermantes, like a carved and mellow tower that traverses the ages, had risen already over France when the sky was still empty at those points where, later, were to rise Notre Dame of Paris and Notre Dame of Chartres, when on the summit of the hill of Laon the nave of its cathedral had not yet been poised, like the Ark of the Deluge on the summit of Mount Ararat, crowded with Patriarchs and Judges anxiously leaning from its windows to see whether the wrath of God were yet appeased, carrying with it the types of the vegetation that was to multiply on the earth, brimming over with animals which have escaped even by the towers, where oxen grazing calmly upon the roof look down over the plains of Champagne; when the traveller who left Beauvais at the close of day did not yet see, following him and turning with his road, outspread against the gilded screen of the western sky, the black, ribbed wings of the cathedral. It was, this 'Guermantes,' like the scene of a novel, an imaginary landscape which I could with difficulty picture to myself and longed all the more to discover, set in the midst of real lands and roads which all of a sudden would become alive with heraldic details, within a few miles of a railway station; I recalled the names of the places round it as if they had been situated at the foot of Parnassus or of Helicon, and they seemed precious to me, as the physical conditions—in the realm of topographical science—required for the production of an unaccountable phenomenon. I saw again the escutcheons blazoned beneath the windows of Combray church; their quarters filled, century after century, with all the lordships which, by marriage or conquest, this illustrious house had brought flying to it from all the corners of Germany, Italy and France; vast territories in the North, strong cities in the South, assembled there to group themselves in Guermantes, and, losing their material quality, to inscribe allegorically their dungeon vert, or castle triple-towered argent upon its azure field. I had heard of the famous tapestries of Guermantes, I could see them, mediaeval and blue, a trifle coarse, detach themselves like a floating cloud from the legendary, amaranthine name at the foot of the ancient forest in which Childebert went so often hunting; and this delicate, mysterious background of their lands, this vista of the ages, it seemed to me that, as effectively as by journeying to see them, I might penetrate all their secrets simply by coming in contact for a moment in Paris with Mme. de Guermantes, the princess paramount of the place and lady of the lake, as if her face, her speech must possess the local charm of forest groves and streams, and the same secular peculiarities as the old customs recorded in her archives. But then I had met Saint-Loup; he had told me that the castle had borne the name of Guermantes only since the seventeenth century, when that family had acquired it. They had lived, until then, in the neighbourhood, but their title was not taken from those parts. The village of Guermantes had received its name from the castle round which it had been built, and so that it should not destroy the view from the castle, a servitude, still in force, traced the line of its streets and limited the height of its houses. As for the tapestries, they were by Boucher, bought in the nineteenth century by a Guermantes with a taste for the arts, and hung, interspersed with a number of sporting pictures of no merit which he himself had painted, in a hideous drawing-room upholstered in 'adrianople' and plush. By these revelations Saint-Loup had introduced into the castle elements foreign to the name of Guermantes which made it impossible for me to continue to extract solely from the resonance of the syllables the stone and mortar of its walls. And so, in the heart of the name, was effaced the castle mirrored in its lake, and what now became apparent to me, surrounding Mme. de Guermantes as her dwelling, had been her house in Paris, the Hôtel de Guermantes, limpid like its name, for no material and opaque element intervened to interrupt and blind its transparence. As the word church signifies not only the temple but the assembly of the faithful also, this Hôtel de Guermantes comprised all those who shared the life of the Duchess, but these intimates on whom I had never set eyes were for me only famous and poetic names, and knowing exclusively persons who themselves also were names only, did but enhance and protect the mystery of the Duchess by extending all round her a vast halo which at the most declined in brilliance as its circumference increased.

In the parties which she gave, since I could not imagine the guests as having any bodies, any moustaches, any boots, as making any utterances that were commonplace, or even original in a human and rational way, this whirlpool of names, introducing less material substance than would a phantom banquet or a spectral ball, round that statuette in Dresden china which was Madame de Guermantes, kept for her palace of glass the transparence of a showcase. Then, after Saint-Loup had told me various anecdotes about his cousin's chaplain, her gardener, and the rest, the Hôtel de Guermantes had become—as the Louvre might have been in days gone by—a kind of castle, surrounded, in the very heart of Paris, by its own domains, acquired by inheritance, by virtue of an ancient right that had quaintly survived, over which she still enjoyed feudal privileges. But this last dwelling itself vanished when we had come to live beside Mme. de Villeparisis in one of the flats adjoining that occupied by Mme. de Guermantes in a wing of the Hôtel. It was one of those old town houses, a few of which are perhaps still to be found, in which the court of honour—whether they were alluvial deposits washed there by the rising tide of democracy, or a legacy from a more primitive time when the different trades were clustered round the overlord—is flanked by little shops and workrooms, a shoemaker's, for instance, or a tailor's, such as we see nestling between the buttresses of those cathedrals which the aesthetic zeal of the restorer has not swept clear of such accretions; a porter who also does cobbling, keeps hens, grows flowers, and, at the far end, in the main building, a 'Comtesse' who, when she drives out in her old carriage and pair, flaunting on her hat a few nasturtiums which seem to have escaped from the plot by the porter's lodge (with, by the coachman's side on the box, a footman who gets down to leave cards at every aristocratic mansion in the neighbourhood), scatters vague little smiles and waves her hand in greeting to the porter's children and to such of her respectable fellow-tenants as may happen to be passing, who, to her contemptuous affability and levelling pride, seem all the same.

In the house in which we had now come to live, the great lady at the end of the courtyard was a Duchess, smart and still quite young. She was, in fact, Mme. de Guermantes and, thanks to Françoise, I soon came to know all about her household. For the Guermantes (to whom Françoise regularly alluded as the people 'below,' or 'downstairs') were her constant preoccupation from the first thing in the morning when, as she did Mamma's hair, casting a forbidden, irresistible, furtive glance down into the courtyard, she would say: "Look at that, now; a pair of holy Sisters; that'll be for downstairs, surely;" or, "Oh! just look at the fine pheasants in the kitchen window; no need to ask where they came from, the Duke will have been out with his gun!"—until the last thing at night when, if her ear, while she was putting out my night-things, caught a few notes of a song, she would conclude: "They're having company down below; gay doings, I'll be bound;" whereupon, in her symmetrical face, beneath the arch of her now snow-white hair, a smile from her young days, sprightly but proper, would for a moment set each of her features in its place, arranging them in an intricate and special order, as though for a country-dance.

But the moment in the life of the Guermantes which excited the keenest interest in Françoise, gave her the most complete satisfaction and at the same time the sharpest annoyance was that at which, the two halves of the great gate having been thrust apart, the Duchess stepped into her carriage. It was generally a little while after our servants had finished the celebration of that sort of solemn passover which none might disturb, called their midday dinner, during which they were so far taboo that my father himself was not allowed to ring for them, knowing moreover that none of them would have paid any more attention to the fifth peal than to the first, and that the discourtesy would therefore have been a pure waste of time and trouble, though not without trouble in store for himself. For Françoise (who, in her old age, lost no opportunity of standing upon her dignity) would without fail have presented him, for the rest of the day, with a face covered with the tiny red cuneiform hieroglyphs by which she made visible—though by no means legible—to the outer world the long tale of her griefs and the profound reasons for her dissatisfactions. She would enlarge upon them, too, in a running 'aside,' but not so that we could catch her words. She called this practice—which, she imagined, must be infuriating, 'mortifying' as she herself put it, 'vexing' to us—'saying low masses all the blessed day.'

The last rites accomplished, Françoise, who was at one and the same time, as in the primitive church, the celebrant and one of the faithful, helped herself to a final glass, undid the napkin from her throat, folded it after wiping from her lips a stain of watered wine and coffee, slipped it into its ring, turned a doleful eye to thank 'her' young footman who, to shew his zeal in her service, was saying: "Come, ma'am, a drop more of the grape; it's d'licious to-day," and went straight across to the window, which she flung open, protesting that it was too hot to breathe in 'this wretched kitchen.' Dexterously casting, as she turned the latch and let in the fresh air, a glance of studied indifference into the courtyard below, she furtively elicited the conclusion that the Duchess was not ready yet to start, brooded for a moment with contemptuous, impassioned eyes over the waiting carriage, and, this meed of attention once paid to the things of the earth, raised them towards the heavens, whose purity she had already divined from the sweetness of the air and the warmth of the sun; and let them rest on a corner of the roof, at the place where, every spring, there came and built, immediately over the chimney of my bedroom, a pair of pigeons like those she used to hear cooing from her kitchen at Combray.

"Ah! Combray, Combray!" she cried. And the almost singing tone in which she declaimed this invocation might, taken with the Arlesian purity of her features, have made the onlooker suspect her of a Southern origin and that the lost land which she was lamenting was no more, really, than a land of adoption. If so, he would have been wrong, for it seems that there is no province that has not its own South-country; do we not indeed constantly meet Savoyards and Bretons in whose speech we find all those pleasing transpositions of longs and shorts that are characteristic of the Southerner? "Ah, Combray, when shall I look on thee again, poor land! When shall I pass the blessed day among thy hawthorns, under our own poor lily-oaks, hearing the grasshoppers sing, and the Vivonne making a little noise like someone whispering, instead of that wretched bell from our young master, who can never stay still for half an hour on end without having me run the length of that wicked corridor. And even then he makes out I don't come quick enough; you'd need to hear the bell ring before he has pulled it, and if you're a minute late, away he flies into the most towering rage. Alas, poor Combray; maybe I shall see thee only in death, when they drop me like a stone into the hollow of the tomb. And so, nevermore shall I smell thy lovely hawthorns, so white and all. But in the sleep of death I dare say I shall still hear those three peals of the bell which will have driven me to damnation in this world."

Her soliloquy was interrupted by the voice of the waistcoat-maker downstairs, the same who had so delighted my grandmother once, long ago, when she had gone to pay a call on Mme. de Villeparisis, and now occupied no less exalted a place in Françoise's affections. Having raised his head when he heard our window open, he had already been trying for some time to attract his neighbour's attention, in order to bid her good day. The coquetry of the young girl that Françoise had once been softened and refined for M. Jupien the querulous face of our old cook, dulled by age, ill-temper and the heat of the kitchen fire, and it was with a charming blend of reserve, familiarity and modesty that she bestowed a gracious salutation on the waistcoat-maker, but without making any audible response, for if she did infringe Mamma's orders by looking into the courtyard, she would never have dared to go the length of talking from the window, which would have been quite enough (according to her) to bring down on her 'a whole chapter' from the Mistress. She pointed to the waiting carriage, as who should say: "A fine pair, eh!" though what she actually muttered was: "What an old rattle-trap!" but principally because she knew that he would be bound to answer, putting his hand to his lips so as to be audible without having to shout:

"*You* could have one too if you liked, as good as they have and better, I dare say, only you don't care for that sort of thing."

And Franoise, after a modest, evasive signal of delight, the meaning of which was, more or less: "Tastes differ, you know; simplicity's the rule in this house," shut the window again in case Mamma should come in. These 'you' who might have had more horses than the Guermantes were ourselves, but Jupien was right in saying 'you' since, except for a few purely personal gratifications, such as, when she coughed all day long without ceasing and everyone in the house was afraid of catching her cold, that of pretending, with an irritating little titter, that she had not got a cold, like those plants that an animal to which they are wholly attached keeps alive with food which it catches, eats and digests for them and of which it offers them the ultimate and easily assimilable residue, Françoise lived with us in full community; it was we who, with our virtues, our wealth, our style of living, must take on ourselves the task of concocting those little sops to her vanity out of which was formed—with the addition of the recognised rights of freely practising the cult of the midday dinner according to the traditional custom, which included a mouthful of air at the window when the meal was finished, a certain amount of loitering in the street when she went out to do her marketing, and a holiday on Sundays when she paid a visit to her niece—the portion of happiness indispensable to her existence. And so it can be understood that Françoise might well have succumbed in those first days of our migration, a victim, in a house where my father's claims to distinction were not yet known, to a malady which she herself called 'wearying,' wearying in the active sense in which the word *ennui* is employed by Corneille, or in the last letters of soldiers who end by taking their own lives because they are wearying for their girls or for their native villages. Françoise's wearying had soon been cured by none other than Jupien, for he at once procured her a pleasure no less keen, indeed more refined than she would have felt if we had decided to keep a carriage. "Very good class, those Juliens," (for Françoise readily assimilated new names to those with which she was already familiar) "very worthy people; you can see it written on their faces." Jupien was in fact able to understand, and to inform the world that if we did not keep a carriage it was because we had no wish for one. This new friend of Françoise was very little at home, having obtained a post in one of the Government offices. A waistcoat-maker first of all, with the 'chit of a girl' whom my grandmother had taken for his daughter, he had lost all interest in the exercise of that calling after his assistant (who, when still little more than a child, had shewn great skill in darning a torn skirt, that day when my grandmother had gone to call on Mme. de Villeparisis) had turned to ladies' fashions and become a seamstress. A prentice hand, to begin with, in a dressmaker's workroom, set to stitch a seam, to fasten a flounce, to sew on a button or to press a crease, to fix a waistband with hooks and eyes, she had quickly risen to be second and then chief assistant, and having formed a connexion of her own among ladies of fashion now worked at home, that is to say in our courtyard, generally with one or two of her young friends from the workroom, whom she had taken on as apprentices. After this, Jupien's presence in the place had ceased to matter. No doubt the little girl (a big girl by this time) had often to cut out waistcoats still. But with her friends to assist her she needed no one besides. And so Jupien, her uncle, had sought employment outside. He was free at first to return home at midday, then, when he had definitely succeeded the man whose substitute only he had begun by being, not before dinner-time. His appointment to the 'regular establishment' was, fortunately, not announced until some weeks after our arrival, so that his courtesy could be brought to bear on her long enough to help Françoise to pass through the first, most difficult phase without undue suffering. At the same time, and without underrating his value to Françoise as, so to speak, a sedative during the period of transition, I am bound to say that my first impression of Jupien had been far from favourable. At a little distance, entirely ruining the effect that his plump cheeks and vivid colouring would otherwise have produced, his eyes, brimming with a compassionate, mournful, dreamy gaze, led one to suppose that he was seriously ill or had just suffered a great bereavement. Not only was he nothing of the sort, but as soon as he opened his mouth (and his speech, by the way, was perfect) he was quite markedly cynical and cold. There resulted from this discord between eyes and lips a certain falsity which was not attractive, and by which he had himself the air of being made as uncomfortable as a guest who arrives in morning dress at a party where everyone else is in evening dress, or as a commoner who having to speak to a Royal Personage does not know exactly how he ought to address him and gets round the difficulty by cutting down his remarks to almost nothing. Jupien's (here the comparison ends) were, on the contrary, charming. Indeed, corresponding possibly to this overflowing of his face by his eyes (which one ceased to notice when one came to know him), I soon discerned in him a rare intellect, and one of the most spontaneously literary that it has been my privilege to come across, in the sense that, probably without education, he possessed or had assimilated, with the help only of a few books skimmed in early life, the most ingenious turns of speech. The most gifted people that I had known had died young. And so I was convinced that Jupien's life would soon be cut short. Kindness was among his qualities, and pity, the most delicate and the most generous feelings for others. But his part in the life of Françoise had soon ceased to be indispensable. She had learned to put up with understudies.

Indeed, when a tradesman or servant came to our door with a parcel or message, while seeming to pay no attention and merely pointing vaguely to an empty chair, Françoise so skilfully put to the best advantage the few seconds that he spent in the kitchen, while he waited for Mamma's answer, that it was very seldom that the stranger went away without having ineradicably engraved upon his memory the conviction that, if we 'did not have' any particular thing, it was because we had 'no wish' for it. If she made such a point of other people's knowing that we 'had money' (for she knew nothing of what Saint-Loup used to call partitive articles, and said simply 'have money,' 'fetch water'), of their realising that we were rich, it was not because riches with nothing else besides, riches without virtue, were in her eyes the supreme good in life; but virtue without riches was not her ideal either. Riches were for her, so to speak, a necessary condition of virtue, failing which virtue itself would lack both merit and charm. She distinguished so little between them that she had come in time to invest each with the other's attributes, to expect some material comfort from virtue, to discover something edifying in riches.

As soon as she had shut the window again, which she did quickly—otherwise Mamma would, it appeared, have heaped on her 'every conceivable insult'—Françoise began with many groans and sighs to put straight the kitchen table.

"There are some Guermantes who stay in the Rue de la Chaise," began my father's valet; "I had a friend who used to be with them; he was their second coachman. And I know a fellow, not my old pal, but his brother-in-law, who did his time in the Army with one of the Baron de Guermantes's stud grooms. Does your mother know you're out?" added the valet, who was in the habit, just as he used to hum the popular airs of the season, of peppering his conversation with all the latest witticisms.

Françoise, with the tired eyes of an ageing woman, eyes which moreover saw everything from Combray, in a hazy distance, made out not the witticism that underlay the words, but that there must be something witty in them since they bore no relation to the rest of his speech and had been uttered with considerable emphasis by one whom she knew to be a joker. She smiled at him, therefore, with an air of benevolent bewilderment, as who should say: "Always the same, that Victor!" And she was genuinely pleased, knowing that listening to smart sayings of this sort was akin—if remotely—to those reputable social pleasures for which, in every class of society, people make haste to dress themselves in their best and run the risk of catching cold. Furthermore, she believed the valet to be a friend after her own heart, for he never left off denouncing, with fierce indignation, the appalling measures which the Republic was about to enforce against the clergy. Françoise had not yet learned that our cruellest adversaries are not those who contradict and try to convince us, but those who magnify or invent reports which may make us unhappy, taking care not to include any appearance of justification, which might lessen our discomfort, and perhaps give us some slight regard for a party which they make a point of displaying to us, to complete our torment, as being at once terrible and triumphant.

"The Duchess must be connected with all that lot," said Françoise, bringing the conversation back to the Guermantes of the Rue de la Chaise, as one plays a piece over again from the andante. "I can't recall who it was told me that one of them had married a cousin of the Duke. It's the same kindred, anyway. Ay, they're a great family, the Guermantes!" she added, in a tone of respect founding the greatness of the family at once on the number of its branches and the brilliance of its connexions, as Pascal founds the truth of Religion on Reason and on the Authority of the Scriptures. For since there was but the single word 'great' to express both meanings, it seemed to her that they formed a single idea, her vocabulary, like cut stones sometimes, shewing thus on certain of its facets a flaw which projected a ray of darkness into the recesses of her mind. "I wonder now if it wouldn't be them that have their castle at Guermantes, not a score of miles from Combray; then they must be kin to their cousin at Algiers, too." My mother and I long asked ourselves who this cousin at Algiers could be until finally we discovered that Françoise meant by the name 'Algiers' the town of Angers. What is far off may be more familiar to us than what is quite near. Françoise, who knew the name 'Algiers' from some particularly unpleasant dates that used to be given us at the New Year, had never heard of Angers. Her language, like the French language itself, and especially that of place-names, was thickly strewn with errors. "I meant to talk to their butler about it. What is it again you call him?" she interrupted herself as though putting a formal question as to the correct procedure, which she went on to answer with: "Oh, of course, it's Antoine you call him!" as though Antoine had been a title. "He's the one who could tell me, but he's quite the gentleman, he is, a great scholar, you'd say they'd cut his tongue out, or that he'd forgotten to learn to speak. He makes no response when you talk to him," went on Françoise, who used 'make response' in the same sense as Mme. de Sévigné. "But," she added, quite untruthfully, "so long as I know what's boiling in my pot, I don't bother my head about what's in other people's. Whatever he is, he's not a Catholic. Besides, he's not a courageous man." (This criticism might have led one to suppose that Françoise had changed her mind about physical bravery which, according to her, in Combray days, lowered men to the level of wild beasts. But it was not so. 'Courageous' meant simply a hard worker.) "They do say, too, that he's thievish as a magpie, but it doesn't do to believe all one hears. The servants never stay long there because of the lodge; the porters are jealous and set the Duchess against them. But it's safe to say that he's a real twister, that Antoine, and his Antoinesse is no better," concluded Françoise, who, in furnishing the name 'Antoine' with a feminine ending that would designate the butler's wife, was inspired, no doubt, in her act of word-formation by an unconscious memory of the words *chanoine* and *chanoinesse*. If so, she was not far wrong. There is still a street near Notre-Dame called Rue Chanoinesse, a name which must have been given to it (since it was never inhabited by any but male Canons) by those Frenchmen of olden days of whom Françoise was, properly speaking, the contemporary. She proceeded, moreover, at once to furnish another example of this way of forming feminine endings, for she went on: "But one thing sure and certain is that it's the Duchess that has Guermantes Castle. And it's she that is the Lady Mayoress down in those parts. That's always something."

"I can well believe that it is something," came with conviction from the footman, who had not detected the irony.

"You think so, do you, my boy, you think it's something? Why, for folk like them to be Mayor and Mayoress, it's just thank you for nothing. Ah, if it was mine, that Guermantes Castle, you wouldn't see me setting foot in Paris, I can tell you. I'm sure a family who've got something to go on with, like Monsieur and Madame here, must have queer ideas to stay on in this wretched town rather than get away down to Combray the moment they're free to start, and no one hindering them. Why do they put off retiring? They've got everything they want. Why wait till they're dead? Ah, if I had only a crust of dry bread to eat and a faggot to keep me warm in winter, a fine time I'd have of it at home in my brother's poor old house at Combray. Down there you do feel you're alive; you haven't all these houses stuck up in front of you, there is so little noise at night-time, you can hear the frogs singing five miles off and more."

"That must indeed be fine!" exclaimed the young footman with enthusiasm, as though this last attraction had been as peculiar to Combray as the gondola is to Venice. A more recent arrival in the household than my father's valet, he used to talk to Françoise about things which might interest not himself so much as her. And Françoise, whose face wrinkled up in disgust when she was treated as a mere cook, had for the young footman, who referred to her always as the 'housekeeper,' that peculiar tenderness which Princes not of the blood royal feel towards the well-meaning young men who dignify them with a 'Highness.'

"At any rate one knows what one's about, there, and what time of year it is. It isn't like here where you won't find one wretched buttercup flowering at holy Easter any more than you would at Christmas, and I can't hear so much as the tiniest angelus ring when I lift my old bones out of bed in the morning. Down there, you can hear every hour; there's only the one poor bell, but you say to yourself: 'My brother will be coming in from the field now,' and you watch the daylight fade, and the bell rings to bless the fruits of the earth, and you have time to take a turn before you light the lamp. But here it's daytime and it's nighttime, and you go to bed, and you can't say any more than the dumb beasts what you've been about all day."

"I gather Méséglise is a fine place, too, Madame," broke in the young footman, who found that the conversation was becoming a little too abstract for his liking, and happened to remember having heard us, at table, mention Méséglise.

"Oh! Méséglise, is it?" said Françoise with the broad smile which one could always bring to her lips by uttering any of those names—Méséglise, Combray, Tansonville. They were so intimate a part of her life that she felt, on meeting them outside it, on hearing them used in conversation, a hilarity more or less akin to that which a professor excites in his class by making an allusion to some contemporary personage whose name the students had never supposed could possibly greet their ears from the height of the academic chair. Her pleasure arose also from the feeling that these places were something to her which they were not for the rest of the world, old companions with whom one has shared many delights; and she smiled at them as if she found in them something witty, because she did find there a great part of herself.

"Yes, you may well say so, son, it is a pretty enough place is Méséglise;" she went on with a tinkling laugh, "but how did you ever come to hear tell of Méséglise?"

"How did I hear of Méséglise? But it's a well-known place; people have told me about it—yes, over and over again," he assured her with that criminal inexactitude of the informer who, whenever we attempt to form an impartial estimate of the importance that a thing which matters to us may have for other people, makes it impossible for us to succeed.

"I can tell you, it's better down there, under the cherry trees, than standing before the fire all day."

She spoke to them even of Eulalie as a good person. For since Eulalie's death Françoise had completely forgotten that she had loved her as little in her lifetime as she loved every one whose cupboard was bare, who was dying of hunger, and after that came, like a good for nothing, thanks to the bounty of the rich, to 'put on airs.' It no longer pained her that Eulalie had so skilfully managed, Sunday after Sunday, to secure her 'trifle' from my aunt. As for the latter, Françoise never left off singing her praises.

"But it was at Combray, surely, that you used to be, with a cousin of Madame?" asked the young footman.

"Yes, with Mme. Octave—oh, a dear, good, holy woman, my poor friends, and a house where there was always enough and to spare, and all of the very best, a good woman, you may well say, who had no pity on the partridges, or the pheasants, or anything; you might turn up five to dinner or six, it was never the meat that was lacking, and of the first quality too, and white wine, and red wine, and everything you could wish." (Françoise used the word 'pity' in the sense given it by Labruyère.) "It was she that paid the damages, always, even if the family stayed for months and years." (This reflection was not really a slur upon us, for Françoise belonged to an epoch when the words 'damages' was not restricted to a legal use and meant simply expense.) "Ah, I can tell you, people didn't go empty away from that house. As his reverence the Curé has told us, many's the time, if there ever was a woman who could count on going straight before the Throne of God, it was she. Poor Madame, I can hear her saying now, in the little voice she had: 'You know, Françoise, I can eat nothing myself, but I want it all to be just as nice for the others as if I could.' They weren't for her, the victuals, you may be quite sure. If you'd only seen her, she weighed no more than a bag of cherries; there wasn't that much of her. She would never listen to a word I said, she would never send for the doctor. Ah, it wasn't in that house that you'd have to gobble down your dinner. She liked her servants to be fed properly. Here, it's been just the same again to-day; we haven't had time for so much as to break a crust of bread; everything goes like ducks and drakes."

What annoyed her more than anything were the rusks of pulled bread that my father used to eat. She was convinced that he had them simply to give himself airs and to keep her 'dancing.' "I can tell you frankly," the young footman assured her, "that I never saw the like." He said it as if he had seen everything, and as if in him the range of a millennial experience extended over all countries and their customs, among which was not anywhere to be found a custom of eating pulled bread. "Yes, yes," the butler muttered, "but that will all be changed; the men are going on strike in Canada, and the Minister told Monsieur the other evening that he's clearing two hundred thousand francs out of it." There was no note of censure in his tone, not that he was not himself entirely honest, but since he regarded all politicians as unsound the crime of peculation seemed to him less serious than the pettiest larceny. He did not even stop to ask himself whether he had heard this historic utterance aright, and was not struck by the improbability that such a thing would have been admitted by the guilty party himself to my father without my father's immediately turning him out of the house. But the philosophy of Combray made it impossible for Françoise to expect that the strikes in Canada could have any repercussion on the use of pulled bread. "So long as the world goes round, look, there'll be masters to keep us on the trot, and servants to do their bidding." In disproof of this theory of perpetual motion, for the last quarter of an hour my mother (who probably did not employ the same measures of time as Françoise in reckoning the duration of the latter's dinner) had been saying:

"What on earth can they be doing? They've been at least two hours at their dinner."

And she rang timidly three or four times. Françoise, 'her' footman, the butler, heard the bell ring, not as a summons to themselves, and with no thought of answering it, but rather like the first sounds of the instruments being tuned when the next part of a concert is just going to begin, and one knows that there will be only a few minutes more of interval. And so, when the peals were repeated and became more urgent, our servants began to pay attention, and, judging that they had not much time left and that the resumption of work was at hand, at a peal somewhat louder than the rest gave a collective sigh and went their several ways, the footman slipping downstairs to smoke a cigarette outside the door, Françoise, after a string of reflexions on ourselves, such as: "They've got the jumps to-day, surely," going up to put her things tidy in her attic, while the butler, having supplied himself first with note-paper from my bedroom, polished off the arrears of his private correspondence.

Despite the apparent stiffness of their butler, Françoise had been in a position, from the first, to inform me that the Guermantes occupied their mansion by virtue not of an immemorial right but of a quite recent tenancy, and that the garden over which it looked on the side that I did not know was quite small and just like all the gardens along the street; and I realised at length that there were not to be seen there pit and gallows or fortified mill, secret chamber, pillared dovecot, manorial bakehouse or tithe-barn, dungeon or drawbridge, or fixed bridge either for that matter, any more than toll-houses or pinnacles, charters, muniments, ramparts or commemorative mounds. But just as Elstir, when the bay of Balbec, losing its mystery, had become for me simply a portion, interchangeable with any other, of the total quantity of salt water distributed over the earth's surface, had suddenly restored to it a personality of its own by telling me that it was the gulf of opal painted by Whistler in his 'Harmonies in Blue and Silver,' so the name Guermantes had seen perish under the strokes of Françoise's hammer the last of the dwellings that had issued from its syllables when one day an old friend of my father said to us, speaking of the Duchess: "She is the first lady in the Faubourg Saint-Germain; hers is the leading house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain." No doubt the most exclusive drawing-room, the leading house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain was little or nothing after all those other mansions of which in turn I had dreamed. And yet in this one too (and it was to be the last of the series), there was something, however humble, quite apart from its material components, a secret differentiation.

And it became all the more essential that I should be able to explore in the drawing-room of Mme. de Guermantes, among her friends, the mystery of her name, since I did not find it in her person when I saw her leave the house in the morning on foot, or in the afternoon in her carriage. Once before, indeed, in the church at Combray, she had appeared to me in the blinding flash of a transfiguration, with cheeks irreducible to, impenetrable by, the colour of the name Guermantes and of afternoons on the banks of the Vivonne, taking the place of my shattered dream like a swan or willow into which has been changed a god or nymph, and which henceforward, subjected to natural laws, will glide over the water or be shaken by the wind. And yet, when that radiance had vanished, hardly had I lost sight of it before it formed itself again, like the green and rosy afterglow of sunset after the sweep of the oar has broken it, and in the solitude of my thoughts the name had quickly appropriated to itself my impression of the face. But now, frequently, I saw her at her window, in the courtyard, in the street, and for myself at least if I did not succeed in integrating in her the name Guermantes, I cast the blame on the impotence of my mind to accomplish the whole act that I demanded of it; but she, our neighbour, she seemed to make the same error, nay more to make it without discomfiture, without any of my scruples, without even suspecting that it was an error. Thus Mme. de Guermantes shewed in her dresses the same anxiety to follow the fashions as if, believing herself to have become simply a woman like all the rest, she had aspired to that elegance in her attire in which other ordinary women might equal and perhaps surpass her; I had seen her in the street gaze admiringly at a well-dressed actress; and in the morning, before she sallied forth on foot, as if the opinion of the passers-by, whose vulgarity she accentuated by parading familiarly through their midst her inaccessible life, could be a tribunal competent to judge her, I would see her before the glass playing, with a conviction free from all pretence or irony, with passion, with ill-humour, with conceit, like a queen who has consented to appear as a servant-girl in theatricals at court, this part, so unworthy of her, of a fashionable woman; and in this mythological oblivion of her natural grandeur, she looked to see whether her veil was hanging properly, smoothed her cuffs, straightened her cloak, as the celestial swan performs all the movements natural to his animal species, keeps his eyes painted on either side of his beak without putting into them any glint of life, and darts suddenly after a bud or an umbrella, as a swan would, without remembering that he is a god. But as the traveller, disappointed by the first appearance of a strange town, reminds himself that he will doubtless succeed in penetrating its charm if he visits its museums and galleries, so I assured myself that, had I been given the right of entry into Mme. de Guermantes's house, were I one of her friends, were I to penetrate into her life, I should then know what, within its glowing orange-tawny envelope, her name did really, objectively enclose for other people, since, after all, my father's friend had said that the Guermantes set was something quite by itself in the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

The life which I supposed them to lead there flowed from a source so different from anything in my experience, and must, I felt, be so indissolubly associated with that particular house that I could not have imagined the presence, at the Duchess's parties, of people in whose company I myself had already been, of people who really existed. For not being able suddenly to change their nature, they would have carried on conversations there of the sort that I knew; their partners would perhaps have stooped to reply to them in the same human speech; and, in the course of an evening spent in the leading house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, there would have been moments identical with moments that I had already lived. Which was impossible. It was thus that my mind was embarrassed by certain difficulties, and the Presence of Our Lord's Body in the Host seemed to me no more obscure a mystery than this leading house in the Faubourg, situated here, on the right bank of the river, and so near that from my bed, in the morning, I could hear its carpets being beaten. But the line of demarcation that separated me from the Faubourg Saint-Germain seemed to me all the more real because it was purely ideal. I felt clearly that it was already part of the Faubourg, when I saw the Guermantes doormat, spread out beyond that intangible Equator, of which my mother had made bold to say, having like myself caught a glimpse of it one day when their door stood open, that it was a shocking state. For the rest, how could their dining-room, their dim gallery upholstered in red plush, into which I could see sometimes from our kitchen window, have failed to possess in my eyes the mysterious charm of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, to form part of it in an essential fashion, to be geographically situated within it, since to have been entertained to dinner in that room was to have gone into the Faubourg Saint-Germain, to have breathed its atmosphere, since the people who, before going to table, sat down by the side of Mme. de Guermantes on the leather-covered sofa in that gallery were all of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. No doubt elsewhere than in the Faubourg, at certain parties, one might see now and then, majestically enthroned amid the vulgar herd of fashion, one of those men who were mere names and varyingly assumed, when one tried to form a picture of them, the aspect of a tournament or of a royal forest. But here, in the leading house in the Faubourg Saint-German, in the drawing-room, in the dim gallery, there were only they. They were wrought of precious materials, the columns that upheld the temple. Indeed for quiet family parties it was from among them only that Mme. de Guermantes might select her guests, and in the dinners for twelve, gathered around the dazzling napery and plate, they were like the golden statues of the Apostles in the Sainte-Chapelle, symbolic, consecrative pillars before the Holy Table. As for the tiny strip of garden that stretched between high walls at the back of the house, where on summer evenings Mme. de Guermantes had liqueurs and orangeade brought out after dinner, how could I not have felt that to sit there of an evening, between nine and eleven, on its iron chairs—endowed with a magic as potent as the leathern sofa—without inhaling the breezes peculiar to the Faubourg Saint-Germain was as impossible as to take a siesta in the oasis of Figuig without thereby being necessarily in Africa. Only imagination and belief can differentiate from the rest certain objects, certain people, and can create an atmosphere. Alas, those picturesque sites, those natural accidents, those local curiosities, those works of art of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, never probably should I be permitted to set my feet among them. And I must content myself with a shiver of excitement as I sighted, from the deep sea (and without the least hope of ever landing there) like an outstanding minaret, like the first palm, like the first signs of some exotic industry or vegetation, the well-trodden doormat of its shore.

But if the Hôtel de Guermantes began for me at its hall-door, its dependencies must be regarded as extending a long way farther, according to the Duke, who, looking on all the other tenants as farmers, peasants, purchasers of forfeited estates, whose opinion was of no account, shaved himself every morning in his nightshirt at the window, came down into the courtyard, according to the warmth or coldness of the day, in his shirt-sleeves, in pyjamas, in a plaid coat of startling colours, with a shaggy nap, in little light-coloured coats shorter than the jackets beneath, and made one of his grooms lead past him at a trot some horse that he had just been buying. More than once, indeed, the horse broke the window of Jupien's shop, whereupon Jupien, to the Duke's indignation, demanded compensation. "If it were only in consideration of all the good that Madame la Duchesse does in the house, here, and in the parish," said M. de Guermantes, "it is an outrage on this fellow's part to claim a penny from us."

But Jupien had stuck to his point, apparently not having the faintest idea what 'good' the Duchess had ever done. And yet she did do good, but—since one cannot do good to everybody at once—the memory of the benefits that we have heaped on one person is a valid reason for our abstaining from helping another, whose discontent we thereby make all the stronger. From other points of view than that of charity the quarter appeared to the Duke—and this over a considerable area—to be only an extension of his courtyard, a longer track for his horses. After seeing how a new acquisition trotted by itself he would have it harnessed and taken through all the neighbouring streets, the groom running beside the carriage holding the reins, making it pass to and fro before the Duke who stood on the pavement, erect, gigantic, enormous in his vivid clothes, a cigar between his teeth, his head in the air, his eyeglass scrutinous, until the moment when he sprang on the box, drove the horse up and down for a little to try it, then set off with his new turn-out to pick up his mistress in the Champs-Elysées. M. de Guermantes bade good day, before leaving the courtyard, to two couples who belonged more or less to his world; the first, some cousins of his who, like working-class parents, were never at home to look after their children, since every morning the wife went off to the Schola to study counterpoint and fugue, and the husband to his studio to carve wood and beat leather; and after them the Baron and Baronne de Norpois, always dressed in black, she like a pew-opener and he like a mute at a funeral, who emerged several times daily on their way to church. They were the nephew and niece of the old Ambassador who was our friend, and whom my father had, in fact, met at the foot of the staircase without realising from where he came; for my father supposed that so important a personage, one who had come in contact with the most eminent men in Europe and was probably quite indifferent to the empty distinctions of rank, was hardly likely to frequent the society of these obscure, clerical and narrow-minded nobles. They had not been long in the place; Jupien, who had come out into the courtyard to say a word to the husband just as he was greeting M. de Guermantes, called him 'M. Norpois,' not being certain of his name.

"Monsieur Norpois, indeed! Oh, that really is good! Just wait a little! This individual will be calling you Comrade Norpois next!" exclaimed M. de Guermantes, turning to the Baron. He was at last able to vent his spleen against Jupien who addressed him as 'Monsieur,' instead of 'Monsieur le Duc."

One day when M. de Guermantes required some information upon a matter of which my father had professional knowledge, he had introduced himself to him with great courtesy. After that, he had often some neighbourly service to ask of my father and, as soon as he saw him begin to come downstairs, his mind occupied with his work and anxious to avoid any interruption, the Duke, leaving his stable-boys, would come up to him in the courtyard, straighten the collar of his great-coat, with the serviceable deftness inherited from a line of royal body-servants in days gone by, take him by the hand, and, holding it in his own, patting it even to prove to my father, with a courtesan's or courtier's shamelessness, that he, the Duc de

Guermantes, made no bargain about my father's right to the privilege of contact with the ducal flesh, lead him, so to speak, on leash, extremely annoyed and thinking only how he might escape, through the carriage entrance out into the street. He had given us a sweeping bow one day when we had come in just as he was going out in the carriage with his wife; he was bound to have told her my name; but what likelihood was there of her remembering it, or my face either? And besides, what a feeble recommendation to be pointed out simply as being one of her tenants! Another, more valuable, would have been my meeting the Duchess in the drawing-room of Mme. de Villeparisis, who, as it happened, had just sent word by my grandmother that I was to go and see her, and, remembering that I had been intending to go in for literature, had added that I should meet several authors there. But my father felt that I was still a little young to go into society, and as the state of my health continued to give him uneasiness he did not see the use of establishing precedents that would do me no good.

As one of Mme. de Guermantes's footmen was in the habit of talking to Françoise, I picked up the names of several of the houses which she frequented, but formed no impression of any of them; from the moment in which they were a part of her life, of that life which I saw only through the veil of her name, were they not inconceivable?

"To-night there's a big party with a Chinese shadow show at the Princesse de Parme's," said the footman, "but we shan't be going, because at five o'clock Madame is taking the train to Chantilly, to spend a few days with the Duc d'Aumale; but it'll be the lady's maid and valet that are going with her. I'm to stay here. She won't be at all pleased, the Princesse de Parme won't, that's four times already she's written to Madame la Duchesse."

"Then you won't be going down to Guermantes Castle this year?"

"It's the first time we shan't be going there: it's because of the Duke's rheumatics, the doctor says he's not to go there till the hot pipes are in, but we've been there every year till now, right on to January. If the hot pipes aren't ready, perhaps Madame will go for a few days to Cannes, to the Duchesse de Guise, but nothing's settled yet."

"And to the theatre, do you go, sometimes?"

"We go now and then to the Opéra, usually on the evenings when the Princesse de Parme has her box, that's once a week; it seems it's a fine show they give there, plays, operas, everything. Madame refused to subscribe to it herself, but we go all the same to the boxes Madame's friends take, one one night, another another, often with the Princesse de Guermantes, the Duke's cousin's lady. She's sister to the Duke of Bavaria. And so you've got to run upstairs again now, have you?" went on the footman, who, albeit identified with the Guermantes, looked upon masters in general as a political estate, a view which allowed him to treat Françoise with as much respect as if she too were in service with a duchess. "You enjoy good health, ma'am."

"Oh, if it wasn't for these cursed legs of mine! On the plain I can still get along" ('on the plain' meant in the courtyard or in the streets, where

Françoise had no objection to walking, in other words 'on a plane surface') "but it's these stairs that do me in, devil take them. Good day to you, sir, see you again, perhaps, this evening."

She was all the more anxious to continue her conversations with the footman after he mentioned to her that the sons of dukes often bore a princely title which they retained until their fathers were dead. Evidently the cult of the nobility, blended with and accommodating itself to a certain spirit of revolt against it, must, springing hereditarily from the soil of France, be very strongly implanted still in her people. For Françoise, to whom you might speak of the genius of Napoleon or of wireless telegraphy without succeeding in attracting her attention, and without her slackening for an instant the movements with which she was scraping the ashes from the grate or laying the table, if she were simply to be told these idiosyncrasies of nomenclature, and that the younger son of the Duc de Guermantes was generally called Prince d'Oléron, would at once exclaim: "That's fine, that is!" and stand there dazed, as though in contemplation of a stained window in church.

Françoise learned also from the Prince d'Agrigente's valet, who had become friends with her by coming often to the house with notes for the Duchess, that he had been hearing a great deal of talk in society about the marriage of the Marquis de Saint-Loup to Mlle. d'Ambresac, and that it was practically settled.

That villa, that opera-box, into which Mme. de Guermantes transfused the current of her life, must, it seemed to me, be places no less fairylike than her home. The names of Guise, of Parme, of Guermantes-Bavière, differentiated from all possible others the holiday places to which the Duchess resorted, the daily festivities which the track of her bowling wheels bound, as with ribbons, to her mansion. If they told me that in those holidays, in those festivities, consisted serially the life of Mme. de Guermantes, they brought no further light to bear on it. Each of them gave to the life of the Duchess a different determination, but succeeded only in changing the mystery of it, without allowing to escape any of its own mystery which simply floated, protected by a covering, enclosed in a bell, through the tide of the life of all the world. The Duchess might take her luncheon on the shore of the Mediterranean at Carnival time, but, in the villa of Mme. de Guise, where the queen of Parisian society was nothing more, in her white linen dress, among numberless princesses, than a guest like any of the rest, and on that account more moving still to me, more herself by being thus made new, like a star of the ballet who in the fantastic course of a figure takes the place of each of her humbler sisters in succession; she might look at Chinese shadow shows, but at a party given by the Princesse de Parme, listen to tragedy or opera, but from the box of the Princesse de Guermantes.

As we localise in the body of a person all the potentialities of that person's life, our recollections of the people he knows and has just left or is on his way to meet, if, having learned from Françoise that Mme. de Guermantes was going on foot to luncheon with the Princesse de Parme, I saw her, about midday, emerge from her house in a gown of flesh-coloured satin over which her face was of the same shade, like a cloud that rises above the setting sun, it was all the pleasures of the Faubourg Saint-Germain that I saw before me, contained in that small compass, as in a shell, between its twin valves that glowed with roseate nacre.

My father had a friend at the Ministry, one A. J. Moreau, who, to distinguish him from the other Moreaus, took care always to prefix both initials to his name, with the result that people called him, for short, 'A.J.' Well, somehow or other, this A. J. found himself entitled to a stall at the Opéra-Comique on a gala night, he sent the ticket to my father, and as Berma, whom I had not been again to see since my first disappointment, was to give an act of *Phèdre,* my grandmother persuaded my father to pass it on to me.

To tell the truth, I attached no importance to this possibility of hearing Berma which, a few years earlier, had plunged me in such a state of agitation. And it was not without a sense of melancholy that I realized the fact of my indifference to what at one time I had put before health, comfort, everything. It was not that there had been any slackening of my desire for an opportunity to contemplate close at hand the precious particles of reality of which my imagination caught a broken glimpse. But my imagination no longer placed these in the diction of a great actress; since my visits to Elstir, it was on certain tapestries, certain modern paintings that I had brought to bear the inner faith I had once had in this acting, in this tragic art of Berma; my faith, my desire, no longer coming forward to pay incessant worship to the diction, the attitudes of Berma, the counterpart that I possessed of them in my heart had gradually perished, like those other counterparts of the dead in ancient Egypt which had to be fed continually in order to maintain their originals in eternal life. This art had become a feeble, tawdry thing. No deep-lying soul inhabited it any more.

That evening, as, armed with the ticket my father had received from his friend, I was climbing the grand staircase of the Opera, I saw in front of me a man whom I took at first for M. de Charlus, whose bearing he had; when he turned his head to ask some question of one of the staff I saw that I had been mistaken, but I had no hesitation in placing the stranger in the same class of society, from the way not only in which he was dressed but in which he spoke to the man who took the tickets and to the box-openers who were keeping him waiting. For, apart from personal details of similarity, there was still at this period between any smart and wealthy man of that section of the nobility and any smart and wealthy man of the world of finance or 'big business' a strongly marked difference. Where one of the latter would have thought he was giving proof of his exclusiveness by adopting a sharp, haughty tone in speaking to an inferior, the great gentleman, affable, pleasant, smiling, had the air of considering, practising an affectation of humility and patience, a pretence of being just one of the audience, as a privilege of his good breeding. It is quite likely that, on seeing him thus dissemble behind a smile overflowing with good nature the barred threshold of the little world apart which he carried in his person, more than one wealthy banker's son, entering the theatre at that moment, would have taken this great gentleman for a person of no importance if he had not remarked in him an astonishing resemblance to the portrait that had recently appeared in the illustrated papers of a nephew of the Austrian Emperor, the Prince of Saxony, who happened to be in Paris at the time. I knew him to be a great friend of the Guermantes. As I reached the attendant I heard the Prince of Saxony (or his double) say with a smile: "I don't know the number; it was my cousin who told me I had only to ask for her box."

He may well have been the Prince of Saxony; it was perhaps of the Duchesse de Guermantes (whom, in that event, I should be able to watch in the process of living one of those moments of her unimaginable life in her cousin's box) that his eyes formed a mental picture when he referred to 'my cousin who told me I had only to ask for her box,' so much so that that smiling gaze peculiar to himself, those so simple words caressed my heart (far more gently than would any abstract meditation) with the alternative feelers of a possible happiness and a vague distinction. Whatever he was, in uttering this sentence to the attendant he grafted upon a commonplace evening in my everyday life a potential outlet into a new world; the passage to which he was directed after mentioning the word 'box' and along which he now proceeded was moist and mildewed and seemed to lead to subaqueous grottoes, to the mythical kingdom of the water-nymphs. I had before me a gentleman in evening dress who was walking away from me, but I kept playing upon and round him, as with a badly fitting reflector on a lamp, and without ever succeeding in making it actually coincide with him, the idea that he was the Prince of Saxony and was on his way to join the Duchesse de Guermantes. And, for all that he was alone, that idea, external to himself, impalpable, immense, unstable as the shadow projected by a magic lantern, seemed to precede and guide him like that deity, invisible to the rest of mankind, who stands beside the Greek warrior in the hour of battle.

I took my seat, striving all the time to recapture a line from *Phèdre* which I could not quite remember. In the form in which I repeated it to myself it had not the right number of feet, but as I made no attempt to count them, between its unwieldiness and a classical line of poetry it seemed as though no common measure could exist. It would not have surprised me to learn that I must subtract at least half a dozen syllables from that portentous phrase to reduce it to alexandrine dimensions. But suddenly I remembered it, the irremediable asperities of an inhuman world vanished as if by magic; the syllables of the line at once filled up the requisite measure, what there was in excess floated off with the ease, the dexterity of a bubble of air that rises to burst on the water's brink. And, after all, this excrescence with which I had been struggling consisted of but a single foot.

A certain number of orchestra stalls had been offered for sale at the box office and bought, out of snobbishness or curiosity, by such as wished to study the appearance of people whom they might not have another opportunity of seeing at close quarters. And it was indeed a fragment of their true social life, ordinarily kept secret, that one could examine here in public, for, the Princesse de Parme having herself distributed among her friends the seats in stalls, balconies and boxes, the house was like a drawing-room in which everyone changed his place, went to sit here or there wherever he caught sight of a woman whom he knew.

Next to me were some common people who, not knowing the regular subscribers, were anxious to shew that they were capable of identifying them and named them aloud. They went on to remark that these subscribers behaved there as though they were in their own drawing-rooms, meaning that they paid no attention to what was being played. Which was the exact opposite of what did happen. A budding genius who had taken a stall in order to hear Berma thinks only of not soiling his gloves, of not disturbing, of making friends with the neighbour whom chance has put beside him, of pursuing with an intermittent smile the fugitive—avoiding with apparent want of politeness the intercepted gaze of a person of his acquaintance whom he has discovered in the audience and to whom, after a thousand indecisions, he makes up his mind to go and talk just as the three hammer-blows from the stage, sounding before he has had time to reach his friend, force him to take flight, like the Hebrews in the Red Sea, through a heaving tide of spectators and spectatresses whom he has obliged to rise and whose dresses he tears as he passes, or tramples on their boots. On the other hand it was because the society people sat in their boxes (behind the general terrace of the balcony, as in so many little drawing-rooms, the fourth walls of which had been removed, or in so many little cafés, to which one might go for refreshment, without letting oneself be intimidated by the mirrors in gilt frames or the red plush seats, in the Neapolitan style, of the establishment), it was because they rested an indifferent hand on the gilded shafts of the columns which upheld this temple of the lyric art, it was because they remained unmoved by the extravagant honours which seemed to be being paid them by a pair of carved figures which held out towards the boxes branches of palm and laurel, that they and they only would have had minds free to listen to the play, if only they had had minds.

At first there was nothing visible but vague shadows, in which one suddenly struck—like the gleam of a precious stone which one cannot see—the phosphorescence of a pair of famous eyes, or, like a medallion of Henri IV on a dark background, the bent profile of the Duc d'Aumale, to whom an invisible lady was exclaiming "Monseigneur must allow me to take his coat," to which the Prince replied, "Oh, come, come! Really, Madame d'Ambresac." She took it, in spite of this vague prohibition, and was envied by all the rest her being thus honoured.

But in the other boxes, everywhere almost, the white deities who inhabited those sombre abodes had flown for shelter against their shadowy walls and remained invisible. Gradually, however, as the performance went on, their vaguely human forms detached themselves, one by one, from the shades of night which they patterned, and, raising themselves towards the light, allowed their semi-nude bodies to emerge, and rose, and stopped at the limit of their course, at the luminous, shaded surface on which their brilliant faces appeared behind the gaily breaking foam of the feather fans they unfurled and lightly waved, beneath their hyacinthine locks begemmed with pearls, which the flow of the tide seemed to have caught and drawn with it; this side of them, began the orchestra stalls, abode of mortals for ever separated from the transparent, shadowy realm to which, at points here and there, served as boundaries, on its brimming surface, the limpid, mirroring eyes of the water-nymphs. For the folding seats on its shore, the forms of the monsters in the stalls were painted upon the surface of those eyes in simple obedience to the laws of optics and according to their angle of incidence, as happens with those two sections of external reality to which, knowing that they do not possess any soul, however rudimentary, that can be considered as analogous to our own, we should think ourselves mad if we addressed a smile or a glance of recognition: namely, minerals and people to whom we have not been introduced. Beyond this boundary, withdrawing from the limit of their domain, the radiant daughters of the sea kept turning at every moment to smile up at the bearded tritons who clung to the anfractuosities of the cliff, or towards some aquatic demi-god, whose head was a polished stone to which the tides had borne a smooth covering of seaweed, and his gaze a disc of rock crystal. They leaned towards these creatures, offering them sweetmeats; sometimes the flood parted to admit a fresh Nereid who, belated, smiling, apologetic, had just floated into blossom out of the shadowy depths; then, the act ended, having no further hope of hearing the melodious sounds of earth which had drawn them to the surface, plunging back all in a moment the several sisters vanished into the night. But of all these retreats, to the thresholds of which their mild desire to behold the works of man brought the curious goddesses who let none approach them, the most famous was the cube of semi-darkness known to the world as the stage box of the Princesse de Guermantes.

Like a mighty goddess who presides from far aloft over the sports of lesser deities, the Princess had deliberately remained a little way back on a sofa placed sideways in the box, red as a reef of coral, beside a big, glassy splash of reflexion which was probably a mirror and made one think of the section cut by a ray of sunlight, vertical, clear, liquid, through the flashing crystal of the sea. At once plume and blossom, like certain subaqueous growths, a great white flower, downy as the wing of a bird, fell from the brow of the Princess along one of her cheeks, the curve of which it followed with a pliancy, coquettish, amorous, alive, and seemed almost to enfold it like a rosy egg in the softness of a halcyon's nest. Over her hair, reaching in front to her eyebrows and caught back lower down at the level of her throat, was spread a net upon which those little white shells which are gathered on some shore of the South Seas alternated with pearls, a marine mosaic barely emerging from the waves and at every moment plunged back again into a darkness in the depths of which even then a human presence was revealed by the ubiquitous flashing of the Princess's eyes. The beauty which set her far above all the other fabulous daughters of the dusk was not altogether materially and comprehensively inscribed on her neck, her shoulders, her arms, her figure. But the exquisite, unfinished line of the last was the exact starting point, the inevitable focus of invisible lines which the eye could not help prolonging, marvellous lines, springing into life round the woman like the spectrum of an ideal form projected upon the screen of darkness.

"That's the Princesse de Guermantes," said my neighbour to the gentleman beside her, taking care to begin the word 'Princesse' with a string of P's, to shew that a title like that was absurd. "She hasn't been sparing with her pearls. I'm sure, if I had as many as that, I wouldn't make such a display of them; it doesn't look at all well, not to my mind."

And yet, when they caught sight of the Princess, all those who were looking round to see who was in the audience felt springing up for her in their hearts the rightful throne of beauty. Indeed, with the Duchesse de Luxembourg, with Mme. de Morienval, with Mme. de Saint-Euverte, and any number of others, what enabled one to identify their faces would be the juxtaposition of a big red nose to a hare-lip, or of a pair of wrinkled cheeks to a faint moustache. These features were nevertheless sufficient in themselves to attract the eye, since having merely the conventional value of a written document they gave one to read a famous and impressive name; but also they gave one, cumulatively, the idea that ugliness had about it something aristocratic, and that it was unnecessary that the face of a great lady, provided it was distinguished, should be beautiful as well. But like certain artists who, instead of the letters of their names, set at the foot of their canvas a form that is beautiful in itself, a butterfly, a lizard, a flower, so it was the form of a delicious face and figure that the Princess had put in the corner of her box, thereby shewing that beauty can be the noblest of signatures; for the presence there of Mme. de Guermantes-Bavière, who brought to the theatre only such persons as at other times formed part of her intimate circle, was in the eyes of specialists in aristocracy the best possible certificate of the authenticity of the picture which her box presented, a sort of evocation of a scene in the ordinary private life of the Princess in her palaces in Munich and in Paris.

Our imagination being like a barrel organ out of order, which always plays some other tune than that shewn on its card, every time that I had heard any mention of the Princesse de Guermantes-Bavière, a recollection of certain sixteenth-century masterpieces had begun singing in my brain. I was obliged to rid myself quickly of this association, now that I saw her engaged in offering crystallised fruit to a stout gentleman in a swallow-tail coat. Certainly I was very far from the conclusion that she and her guests were mere human beings like the rest of the audience. I understood that what they were doing there was all only a game, and that as a prelude to the acts of their real life (of which, presumably, this was not where they spent the important part) they had arranged, in obedience to a ritual unknown to me, they were feigning to offer and decline sweetmeats, a gesture robbed of its ordinary significance and regulated beforehand like the step of a dancer who alternately raises herself on her toes and circles about an upheld scarf. For all I knew, perhaps at the moment of offering him her sweetmeats the goddess was saying, with that note of irony in her voice (for I saw her smile): "Do have one, won't you?" What mattered that to me? I should have found a delicious refinement in the deliberate dryness, in the style of Mérimée or Meilhac, of such words addressed by a goddess to a demi-god who, conscious himself what were the sublime thoughts which they both had in their minds, in reserve, doubtless, until the moment when they would begin again to live their true life, consenting to join in the game, was answering with the same mysterious bitterness: "Thanks; I should like a cherry." And I should have listened to this dialogue with the same avidity as to a scene from *Le Mari de la Débutante,* where the absence of poetry, of lofty thoughts, things so familiar to me which, I suppose, Meilhac could easily, had he chosen, have put into it a thousand times over, seemed to me in itself a refinement, a conventional refinement and therefore all the more mysterious and instructive.

"That fat fellow is the Marquis de Ganançay," came in a knowing tone from the man next to me, who had not quite caught the name whispered in the row behind.

The Marquis de Palancy, his face bent downwards at the end of his long neck, his round bulging eye glued to the glass of his monocle, was moving with a leisurely displacement through the transparent shade and appeared no more to see the public in the stalls than a fish that drifts past, unconscious of the press of curious gazers, behind the glass wall of an aquarium. Now and again he paused, a venerable, wheezing monument, and the audience could not have told whether he was in pain, asleep, swimming, about to spawn, or merely taking breath. No one else aroused in me so much envy as he, on account of his apparent familiarity with this box and the indifference with which he allowed the Princess to hold out to him her box of sweetmeats; throwing him, at the same time, a glance from her fine eyes, cut in a pair of diamonds which at such moments wit and friendliness seemed to liquefy, whereas, when they were at rest, reduced to their purely material beauty, to their mineral brilliance alone, if the least reflected flash disturbed them ever so slightly, they set the darkness ablaze with inhuman horizontal splendid fires. But now, because the act of *Phèdre* in which Berma was playing was due to start, the Princess came to the front of the box; whereupon, as if she herself were a theatrical production, in the zone of light which she traversed, I saw not only the colour but the material of her adornments change. And in the box, dry now, emerging, a part no longer of the watery realm, the Princess, ceasing to be a Nereid, appeared turbanned in white and blue like some marvellous tragic actress dressed for the part of Zaïre, or perhaps of Orosmane; finally, when she had taken her place in the front row I saw that the soft halcyon's nest which tenderly shielded the rosy nacre of her cheeks was—downy, dazzling, velvety, an immense bird of paradise.

But now my gaze was diverted from the Princesse de Guermantes's box by a little woman who came in, ill-dressed, plain, her eyes ablaze with indignation, followed by two young men, and sat down a few places from me. At length the curtain went up. I could not help being saddened by the reflexion that there remained now no trace of my old disposition, at the period when, so as to miss nothing of the extraordinary phenomenon which I would have gone to the ends of the earth to see, I kept my mind prepared, like the sensitive plates which astronomers take out to Africa, to the West Indies, to make and record an exact observation of a comet or an eclipse; when I trembled for fear lest some cloud (a fit of ill humour on the artist's part or an incident in the audience) should prevent the spectacle from presenting itself with the maximum of intensity; when I should not have believed that I was watching it in the most perfect conditions had I not gone to the very theatre which was consecrated to it like an altar, in which I then felt to be still a part of it, though an accessory part only, the officials with their white carnations, appointed by her, the vaulted balcony covering a pit filled with a shabbily dressed crowd, the women selling programmes that had her photograph, the chestnut trees in the square outside, all those companions, those confidants of my impressions of those days which seemed to me to be inseparable from them. *Phèdre,* the 'Declaration Scene,' Berma, had had then for me a sort of absolute existence. Standing aloof from the world of current experience they existed by themselves, I must go to meet them, I should penetrate what I could of them, and if I opened my eyes and soul to their fullest extent I should still absorb but a very little of them. But how pleasant life seemed to me: the triviality of the form of it that I myself was leading mattered nothing, no more than the time we spend on dressing, on getting ready to go out, since, transcending it, there existed in an absolute form, good and difficult to approach, impossible to possess in their entirety, those more solid realities, *Phèdre* and the way in which Berma spoke her part. Steeped in these dreams of perfection in the dramatic art (a strong dose of which anyone who had at that time subjected my mind to analysis at any moment of the day or even the night would have been able to prepare from it), I was like a battery that accumulates and stores up electricity. And a time had come when, ill as I was, even if I had believed that I should die of it, I should still have been compelled to go and hear Berma. But now, like a hill which from a distance seems a patch of azure sky, but, as we draw nearer, returns to its place in our ordinary field of vision, all this had left the world of the absolute and was no more than a thing like other things, of which I took cognisance because I was there, the actors were people of the same substance as the people I knew, trying to speak in the best possible way these lines of *Phèdre,* which themselves no longer formed a sublime and individual essence, distinct from everything else, but were simply more or less effective lines ready to slip back into the vast corpus of French poetry, of which they were merely a part. I felt a discouragement that was all the more profound in that, if the object of my headstrong and active desire no longer existed, the same tendencies, on the other hand, to indulge in a perpetual dream, which varied from year to year but led me always to sudden impulses, regardless of danger, still persisted. The day on which I rose from my bed of sickness and set out to see, in some country house or other, a picture by Elstir or a mediaeval tapestry, was so like the day on which I ought to have started for Venice, or that on which I did go to hear Berma, or start for Balbec, that I felt before going that the immediate object of my sacrifice would, after a little while, leave me cold, that then I might pass close by the place without stopping even to look at that picture, those tapestries for which I would at this moment risk so many sleepless nights, so many hours of pain. I discerned in the instability of its object the vanity of my effort, and at the same time its vastness, which I had not before noticed, like a neurasthenic whose exhaustion we double by pointing out to him that he is exhausted. In the meantime my musings gave a distinction to everything that had any connexion with them. And even in my most carnal desires, magnetised always in a certain direction, concentrated about a single dream, I might have recognised as their primary motive an idea, an idea for which I would have laid down my life, at the innermost core of which, as in my day dreams while I sat reading all afternoon in the garden at Combray, lay the thought of perfection.

I no longer felt the same indulgence as on the former occasion towards the deliberate expressions of affection or anger which I had then remarked in the delivery and gestures of Aricie, Ismène and Hippolyte. It was not that the players—they were the same, by the way—did not still seek, with the same intelligent application, to impart now a caressing inflexion, or a calculated ambiguity to their voices, now a tragic amplitude, or a suppliant meekness to their movements. Their intonations bade the voice: "Be gentle, sing like a nightingale, caress and woo"; or else, "now wax furious," and then hurled themselves upon it, trying to carry it off with them in their frenzied rush. But it, mutinous, independent of their diction, remained unalterably their natural voice with its material defects or charms, its everyday vulgarity or affectation, and thus presented a sum-total of acoustic or social phenomena which the sentiment contained in the lines they were repeating was powerless to alter.

Similarly the gestures of the players said to their arms, to their garments: "Be majestic." But each of these unsubmissive members allowed to flaunt itself between shoulder and elbow a biceps which knew nothing of the part; they continued to express the triviality of everyday life and to bring into prominence, instead of fine shades of Racinian meaning, mere muscular attachments; and the draperies which they held up fell back again along vertical lines in which the natural law that governs falling bodies was challenged only by an insipid textile pliancy. At this point the little woman who was sitting near me exclaimed:

"Not a hand! Did you ever see such a get-up? She's too old; she can't play the part; she ought to have retired ages ago."

Amid a sibilant protest from their neighbours the two young men with her succeeded in making her keep quiet and her fury raged now only in her eyes. This fury could, moreover, be prompted only by the thought of success, of fame, for Berma, who had earned so much money, was overwhelmed with debts. Since she was always making business or social appointments which she was prevented from keeping, she had messengers flying with apologies along every street in Paris, and what with rooms in hotels which she would never occupy engaged in advance, oceans of scent to bathe her dogs, heavy penalties for breaches of contract with all her managers, failing any more serious expense and being not so voluptuous as Cleopatra, she would have found the means of squandering on telegrams and jobmasters provinces and kingdoms. But the little woman was an actress who had never tasted success, and had vowed a deadly hatred against Berma. The latter had just come on to the stage. And then—oh, the miracle—like those lessons which we laboured in vain to learn overnight, and find intact, got by heart, on waking up next morning, like, too, those faces of dead friends which the impassioned efforts of our memory pursue without recapturing them, and which, when we are no longer thinking of them, are there before our eyes just as they were in life—the talent of Berma, which had evaded me when I sought so greedily to seize its essential quality, now, after these years of oblivion, in this hour of indifference, imposed itself, with all the force of a thing directly seen, on my admiration. Formerly, in my attempts to isolate the talent, I deducted, so to speak, from what I heard the part itself, a part common to all the actresses who appeared as Phèdre, which I had myself studied beforehand so that I might be capable of subtracting it, of receiving in the strained residue only the talent of Mme. Berma. But this talent which I sought to discover outside the part itself was indissolubly one with it. So with a great musician (it appears that this was the case with Vinteuil when he played the piano), his playing is that of so fine a pianist that one cannot even be certain whether the performer is a pianist at all, since (not interposing all that mechanism of muscular effort, crowned here and there with brilliant effects, all that spattering shower of notes in which at least the listener who does not quite know where he is thinks that he can discern talent in its material, tangible objectivity) his playing is become so transparent, so full of what he is interpreting, that himself one no longer sees and he is nothing now but a window opening upon a great work of art. The intentions which surrounded, like a majestic or delicate border, the voice and mimicry of Aricie, Ismène or Hippolyte I had been able to distinguish, but Phèdre had taken hers into herself, and my mind had not succeeded in wresting from her diction and attitudes, in apprehending in the miserly simplicity of their unbroken surfaces those treasures, those effects of which no sign emerged, so completely had they been absorbed. Berma's voice, in which not one atom of lifeless matter refractory to the mind remained undissolved, did not allow any sign to be discernible around it of that overflow of tears which one could feel, because they had not been able to absorb it in themselves, trickling over the marble voice of Aricie or Ismène, but had been brought to an exquisite perfection in each of its tiniest cells like the instrument of a master violinist, in whom one means, when one says that his music has a fine sound, to praise not a physical peculiarity but a superiority of soul; and, as in the classical landscape where in the place of a vanished nymph there is an inanimate waterspring, a clear and concrete intention had been transformed into a certain quality of tone, strangely, appropriately, coldly limpid. Berma's arms, which the lines themselves, by the same dynamic force that made the words issue from her lips, seemed to raise on to her bosom like leaves disturbed by a gush of water; her attitude, on the stage, which she had gradually built up, which she was to modify yet further, and which was based upon reasonings of a different profundity from those of which traces might be seen in the gestures of her fellow-actors, but of reasonings that had lost their original deliberation, and had melted into a sort of radiance in which they sent throbbing, round the person of the heroine, elements rich and complex, but which the fascinated spectator took not as an artistic triumph but as a natural gift; those white veils themselves, which, tenuous and clinging, seemed to be of a living substance and to have been woven by the suffering, half-pagan, half-Jansenist, around which they drew close like a frail, shrinking chrysalis; all of them, voice, attitude, gestures, veils, were nothing more, round this embodiment of an idea, which a line of poetry is (an embodiment that, unlike our human bodies, covers the soul not with an opaque screen which prevents us from seeing it, but with a purified, a quickened garment through which the soul is diffused and we discover it), than additional envelopes which instead of concealing shewed up in greater splendour the soul that had assimilated them to itself and had spread itself through them, than layers of different substances, grown translucent, the interpolation of which has the effect only of causing a richer refraction of the imprisoned, central ray that pierces through them, and of making more extensive, more precious and more fair the matter purified by fire in which it is enshrined. So Berma's interpretation was, around Racine's work, a second work, quickened also by the breath of genius.

My own impression, to tell the truth, though more pleasant than on the earlier occasion, was not really different. Only, I no longer put it to the test of a pre-existent, abstract and false idea of dramatic genius, and I understood now that dramatic genius was precisely this. It had just occurred to me that if I had not derived any pleasure from my first hearing of Berma, it was because, as earlier still when I used to meet Gilberte in the Champs-Elysées, I had come to her with too strong a desire. Between my two disappointments there was perhaps not only this resemblance, but another more profound. The impression given us by a person or a work (or a rendering, for that matter) of marked individuality is peculiar to that person or work. We have brought to it the ideas of 'beauty,' 'breadth of style,' 'pathos' and so forth which we might, failing anything better, have had the illusion of discovering in the commonplace show of a 'correct' face or talent, but our critical spirit has before it the insistent challenge of a form of which it possesses no intellectual equivalent, in which it must detect and isolate the unknown element. It hears a shrill sound, an oddly interrogative intonation. It asks itself: "Is that good? Is what I am feeling just now admiration? Is that richness of colouring, nobility, strength?" And what answers it again is a shrill voice, a curiously questioning tone, the despotic impression caused by a person whom one does not know, wholly material, in which there is no room left for 'breadth of interpretation.' And for this reason it is the really beautiful works that, if we listen to them with sincerity, must disappoint us most keenly, because in the storehouse of our ideas there is none that corresponds to an individual impression.

This was precisely what Berma's acting shewed me. This was what was meant by nobility, by intelligence of diction. Now I could appreciate the worth of a broad, poetical, powerful interpretation, or rather it was to this that those epithets were conventionally applied, but only as we give the names of Mars, Venus, Saturn to planets which have no place in classical mythology. We feel in one world, we think, we give names to things in another; between the two we can establish a certain correspondence, but not bridge the interval. It was quite narrow, this interval, this fault that I had had to cross when, that afternoon on which I went first to hear Berma, having strained my ears to catch every word, I had found some difficulty in correlating my ideas of 'nobility of interpretation,' of 'originality,' and had broken out in applause only after a moment of unconsciousness and as if my applause sprang not from my actual impression but was connected in some way with my preconceived ideas, with the pleasure that I found in saying to myself: "At last I am listening to Berma." And the difference that there is between a person, or a work of art which is markedly individual and the idea of beauty, exists just as much between what they make us feel and the idea of love, or of admiration. Wherefore we fail to recognise them. I had found no pleasure in listening to Berma (any more than, earlier still, in seeing Gilberte). I had said to myself: "Well, I do not admire this." But then I was thinking only of mastering the secret of Berma's acting, I was preoccupied with that alone, I was trying to open my mind as wide as possible to receive all that her acting contained. I understood now that all this amounted to nothing more nor less than admiration.

This genius of which Berma's rendering of the part was only the revelation, was it indeed the genius of Racine and nothing more?

I thought so at first. I was soon to be undeceived when the curtain fell on the act from *Phèdre,* amid enthusiastic recalls from the audience, through which the old actress, beside herself with rage, drawing her little body up to its full height, turning sideways in her seat, stiffened the muscles of her face and folded her arms on her bosom to shew that she was not joining the others in their applause, and to make more noticeable a protest which to her appeared sensational though it passed unperceived. The piece that followed was one of those novelties which at one time I had expected, since they were not famous, to be inevitably trivial and of no general application, devoid as they were of any existence outside the performance that was being given of them at the moment. But I had not with them as with a classic the disappointment of seeing the infinity and eternity of a masterpiece occupy no more space or time than the width of the footlights and the length of a performance which would finish it as effectively as a piece written for the occasion. Besides, at every fresh passage which, I felt, had appealed to the audience and would one day be famous, in place of the fame which it was prevented from having won in the past I added that which it would enjoy in the future, by a mental process the converse of that which consists in imagining masterpieces on the day of their first thin performance, when it seemed inconceivable that a title which no one had ever heard before could one day be set, bathed in the same mellow light, beside those of the author's other works. And this part would be set one day in the list of her finest impersonations, next to that of Phèdre. Not that in itself it was not destitute of all literary merit. But Berma was as sublime in one as in the other. I realised then that the work of the playwright was for the actress no more than the material, the nature of which was comparatively unimportant, for the creation of her masterpiece of interpretation, just as the great painter whom I had met at Balbec, Elstir, had found the inspiration for two pictures of equal merit in a school building without any character and a cathedral which was in itself a work of art. And as the painter dissolves houses, carts, people, in some broad effect of light which makes them all alike, so Berma spread out great sheets of terror or tenderness over words that were all melted together in a common mould, lowered or raised to one level, which a lesser artist would have carefully detached from one another. No doubt each of them had an inflexion of its own, and Berma's diction did not prevent one from catching the rhythm of the verse. Is it not already a first element of ordered complexity, of beauty, when, on hearing a rhyme, that is to say something which is at once similar to and different from the preceding rhyme, which was prompted by it, but introduces the variety of a new idea, one is conscious of two systems overlapping each other, one intellectual, the other prosodic? But Berma at the same time made her words, her lines, her whole speeches even, flow into lakes of sound vaster than themselves, at the margins of which it was a joy to see them obliged to stop, to break off; thus it is that a poet takes pleasure in making hesitate for a moment at the rhyming point the word which is about to spring forth, and a composer in merging the various words of his libretto in a single rhythm which contradicts, captures and controls them. Thus into the prose sentences of the modern playwright as into the poetry of Racine Berma managed to introduce those vast images of grief, nobility, passion, which were the masterpieces of her own personal art, and in which she could be recognised as, in the portraits which he has made of different sitters, we recognise a painter.

I had no longer any desire, as on the former occasion, to be able to arrest and perpetuate Berma's attitudes, the fine colour effect which she gave for a moment only in a beam of limelight which at once faded never to reappear, nor to make her repeat a single line a hundred times over. I realised that my original desire had been more exacting than the intentions of the poet, the actress, the great decorative artist who supervised her productions, and that that charm which floated over a line as it was spoken, those unstable poses perpetually transformed into others, those successive pictures were the transient result, the momentary object, the changing masterpiece which the art of the theatre undertook to create and which would perish were an attempt made to fix it for all time by a too much enraptured listener. I did not even make a resolution to come back another day and hear Berma again. I was satisfied with her; it was when I admired too keenly not to be disappointed by the object of my admiration, whether that object were Gilberte or Berma, that I demanded in advance, of the impression to be received on the morrow, the pleasure that yesterday's impression had refused to afford me. Without seeking to analyse the joy which I had begun now to feel, and might perhaps have been turning to some more profitable use, I said to myself, as in the old days I might have said to one of my schoolfellows: "Certainly, I put Berma first!" not without a confused feeling that Berma's genius was not, perhaps, very accurately represented by this affirmation of my preference, or this award to her of a 'first' place, whatever the peace of mind that it might incidentally restore to me.

Just as the curtain was rising on this second play I looked up at Mme. de Guermantes's box. The Princess was in the act—by a movement that called into being an exquisite line which my mind pursued into the void—of turning her head towards the back of the box; her party were all standing, and also turning towards the back, and between the double hedge which they thus formed, with all the assurance, the grandeur of the goddess that she was, but with a strange meekness which so late an arrival, making every one else get up in the middle of the performance, blended with the white muslin in which she was attired, just as an adroitly compounded air of simplicity, shyness and confusion tempered her triumphant smile, the Duchesse de Guermantes, who had at that moment entered the box, came towards her cousin, made a profound obeisance to a young man with fair hair who was seated in the front row, and turning again towards the amphibian monsters who were floating in the recesses of the cavern, gave to these demi-gods of the Jockey Club—who at that moment, and among them all M. de Palancy in particular, were the men whom I should most have liked to be—the familiar 'good evening' of an old and intimate friend, an allusion to the daily sequence of her relations with them during the last fifteen years. I felt the mystery, but could not solve the riddle of that smiling gaze which she addressed to her friends, in the azure brilliance with which it glowed while she surrendered her hand to one and then to another, a gaze which, could I have broken up its prism, analysed its crystallisation, might perhaps have revealed to me the essential quality of the unknown form of life which became apparent in it at that moment. The Duc de Guermantes followed his wife, the flash of his monocle, the gleam of his teeth, the whiteness of his carnation or of his pleated shirt-front scattering, to make room for their light, the darkness of his eyebrows, lips and coat; with a wave of his outstretched hand which he let drop on to their shoulders, vertically, without moving his head, he commanded the inferior monsters, who were making way for him, to resume their seats, and made a profound bow to the fair young man. One would have said that the Duchess had guessed that her cousin, of whom, it was rumoured, she was inclined to make fun for what she called her 'exaggerations' (a name which, from her own point of view, so typically French and restrained, would naturally be applied to the poetry and enthusiasm of the Teuton), would be wearing this evening one of those costumes in which the Duchess thought of her as 'dressed up,' and that she had decided to give her a lesson in good taste. Instead of the wonderful downy plumage which, from the crown of the Princess's head, fell and swept her throat, instead of her net of shells and pearls, the Duchess wore in her hair only a simple aigrette, which, rising above her arched nose and level eyes, reminded one of the crest on the head of a bird. Her neck and shoulders emerged from a drift of snow-white muslin, against which fluttered a swansdown fan, but below this her gown, the bodice of which had for its sole ornament innumerable spangles (either little sticks and beads of metal, or possibly brilliants), moulded her figure with a precision that was positively British. But different as their two costumes were, after the Princess had given her cousin the chair in which she herself had previously been sitting, they could be seen turning to gaze at one another in mutual appreciation.

Possibly a smile would curve the lips of Mme. de Guermantes when next day she referred to the headdress, a little too complicated, which the Princess had worn, but certainly she would declare that it had been, all the same, quite lovely, and marvellously arranged; and the Princess, whose own tastes found something a little cold, a little austere, a little 'tailor-made' in her cousin's way of dressing, would discover in this rigid sobriety an exquisite refinement. Moreover the harmony that existed between them, the universal and pre-established gravitation exercised by their upbringing, neutralised the contrasts not only in their apparel but in their attitude. By those invisible magnetic longitudes which the refinement of their manners traced between them the expansive nature of the Princess was stopped short, while on the other side the formal correctness of the Duchess allowed itself to be attracted and relaxed, turned to sweetness and charm. As, in the play which was now being performed, to realise how much personal poetry Berma extracted from it one had only to entrust the part which she was playing, which she alone could play, to no matter what other actress, so the spectator who should raise his eyes to the balcony might see in two smaller boxes there how an 'arrangement' supposed to suggest that of the Princesse de Guermantes simply made the Baronne de Morienval appear eccentric, pretentious and ill-bred, while an effort, as painstaking as it must have been costly, to imitate the clothes and style of the Duchesse de Guermantes only made Mme. de Cambremer look like some provincial schoolgirl, mounted on wires, rigid, erect, dry, angular, with a plume of raven's feathers stuck vertically in her hair. Perhaps the proper place for this lady was not a theatre in which it was only with the brightest stars of the season that the boxes (even those in the highest tier, which from below seemed like great hampers brimming with human flowers and fastened to the gallery on which they stood by the red cords of their plush-covered partitions) composed a panorama which deaths, scandals, illnesses, quarrels would soon alter, but which this evening was held motionless by attention, heat, giddiness, dust, smartness or boredom, in that so to speak everlasting moment of unconscious waiting and calm torpor which, in retrospect, seems always to have preceded the explosion of a bomb or the first flicker of a fire.

The explanation of Mme. de Cambremer's presence on this occasion was that the Princesse de Parme, devoid of snobbishness as are most truly royal personages, and to make up for this devoured by a pride in and passion for charity which held an equal place in her heart with her taste for what she believed to be the Arts, had bestowed a few boxes here and there upon women like Mme. de Cambremer who were not numbered among the highest aristocratic society but with whom she was connected in various charitable undertakings. Mme. de Cambremer never took her eyes off the Duchesse and Princesse de Guermantes, which was all the simpler for her since, not being actually acquainted with either, she could not be suspected of angling for recognition. Inclusion in the visiting lists of these two great ladies was nevertheless the goal towards which she had been marching for the last ten years with untiring patience. She had calculated that she might reach it, possibly, in five years more. But having been smitten by a relentless malady, the inexorable character of which—for she prided herself upon her medical knowledge—she thought she knew, she was afraid that she might not live so long. This evening she was happy at least in the thought that all these women whom she barely knew would see in her company a man who was one of their own set, the young Marquis de Beausergent, Mme. d'Argencourt's brother, who moved impartially in both worlds and with whom the women of the second were greatly delighted to bedizen themselves before the eyes of those of the first. He was seated behind Mme. de Cambremer on a chair placed at an angle, so that he might rake the other boxes with his glasses. He knew everyone in the house, and, to greet his friends, with the irresistible charm of his beautifully curved figure, and fine fair head, he half rose from his seat, stiffening his body, a smile brightening his blue eyes, with a blend of deference and detachment, a picture delicately engraved, in its rectangular frame, and placed at an angle to the wall, like one of those old prints which portray a great nobleman in his courtly pride. He often accepted these invitations to go with Mme. de Cambremer to the play. In the theatre itself, and on their way out, in the lobby, he stood gallantly by her side in the thick of the throng of more brilliant friends whom he saw about him, and to whom he refrained from speaking, to avoid any awkwardness, just as though he had been in doubtful company. If at such moments there swept by him the Princesse de Guermantes, lightfoot and fair as Diana, letting trail behind her the folds of an incomparable cloak, turning after her every head and followed by every eye (and, most of all, by Mme. de Cambremer's), M. de Beausergent would become absorbed in conversation with his companion, acknowledging the friendly and dazzling smile of the Princess only with constraint, under compulsion, and with the well-bred reserve, the considerate coldness of a person whose friendliness might at the moment have been inconvenient.

Had not Mme. de Cambremer known already that the box belonged to the Princess, she could still have told that the Duchesse de Guermantes was the guest from the air of keener interest with which she was surveying the spectacle of stage and stalls, out of politeness to her hostess. But simultaneously with this centrifugal force, an equal and opposite force generated by the same desire to be sociable drew her attention back to her own attire, her plume, her necklace, her bodice and also to that of the Princess, whose subject, whose slave her cousin seemed thus to proclaim herself, come thither solely to see her, ready to follow her elsewhere should it have taken the fancy of the official occupant of the box to rise and leave, and regarding as composed merely of strangers, worth looking at simply as curiosities, the rest of the house, in which, nevertheless, she numbered many friends to whose boxes she regularly repaired on other evenings and with regard to whom she never failed on those occasions to demonstrate a similar loyalism, exclusive, conditional and hebdomadary. Mme. de Cambremer was surprised to see her there that evening. She knew that the Duchess was staying on very late at Guermantes, and had supposed her to be there still. But she had been told, also, that sometimes, when there was some special function in Paris which she considered it worth her while to attend, Mme. de Guermantes would order one of her carriages to be brought round as soon as she had taken tea with the guns, and, as the sun was setting, start out at a spanking pace through the gathering darkness of the forest, then over the high road, to join the train at Combray and so be in Paris the same evening. "Perhaps she has come up from Guermantes on purpose to hear Berma," thought Mme. de Cambremer, and marvelled at the thought. And she remembered having heard Swann say in that ambiguous jargon which he used in common with M. de Charlus: "The Duchess is one of the noblest souls in Paris, the cream of the most refined, the choicest society." For myself, who derived from the names Guermantes, Bavaria and Condé what I imagined to be the life, the thoughts of the two cousins (I could no longer so ascribe their faces, having seen them), I would rather have had their opinion of *Phèdre* than that of the greatest critic in the world. For in his I should have found merely intellect, an intellect superior to my own but similar in kind. But what the Duchesse and Princesse de Guermantes might think, an opinion which would have furnished me with an invaluable clue to the nature of these two poetic creatures, I imagined with the aid of their names, I endowed with an irrational charm, and, with the thirst, the longing of a fever-stricken wretch, what I demanded that their opinion of *Phèdre* should yield to me was the charm of the summer afternoons that I had spent in wandering along the Guermantes way.

Mme. de Cambremer was trying to make out how exactly the cousins were dressed. For my own part, I never doubted that their garments were peculiar to themselves, not merely in the sense in which the livery with red collar or blue facings had belonged once exclusively to the houses of Guermantes and Condé, but rather as is peculiar to a bird the plumage which, as well as being a heightening of its beauty, is an extension of its body. The toilet of these two ladies seemed to me like a materialisation, snow-white or patterned with colour, of their internal activity, and, like the gestures which I had seen the Princesse de Guermantes make, with no doubt in my own mind that they corresponded to some idea latent in hers, the plumes which swept downward from her brow, and her cousin's glittering spangled bodice seemed each to have a special meaning, to be to one or the other lady an attribute which was hers and hers alone, the significance of which I would eagerly have learned; the bird of paradise seemed inseparable from its wearer as her peacock is from Juno, and I did not believe that any other woman could usurp that spangled bodice, any more than the fringed and flashing aegis of Minerva. And when I turned my eyes to their box, far more than on the ceiling of the theatre, painted with cold and lifeless allegories, it was as though I had seen, thanks to a miraculous rending of the clouds that ordinarily veiled it, the Assembly of the Gods in the act of contemplating the spectacle of mankind, beneath a crimson canopy, in a clear lighted space, between two pillars of Heaven. I gazed on this brief transfiguration with a disturbance which was partly soothed by the feeling that I myself was unknown to these Immortals; the Duchess had indeed seen me once with her husband, but could surely have kept no memory of that, and it gave me no pain that she found herself, owing to the place that she occupied in the box, in a position to gaze down upon the nameless, collective madrepores of the public in the stalls, for I had the happy sense that my own personality had been dissolved in theirs, when, at the moment in which, by the force of certain optical laws, there must, I suppose, have come to paint itself on the impassive current of those blue eyes the blurred outline of the protozoon, devoid of any individual existence, which was myself, I saw a ray illumine them; the Duchess, goddess turned woman, and appearing in that moment a thousand times more lovely, raised, pointed in my direction the white-gloved hand which had been resting on the balustrade of the box, waved it at me in token of friendship; my gaze felt itself trapped in the spontaneous incandescence of the flashing eyes of the Princess, who had unconsciously set them ablaze merely by turning her head to see who it might be that her cousin was thus greeting, while the Duchess, who had remembered me, showered upon me the sparkling and celestial torrent of her smile.

And now every morning, long before the hour at which she would appear, I went by a devious course to post myself at the corner of the street along which she generally came, and, when the moment of her arrival seemed imminent, strolled homewards with an air of being absorbed in something else, looking the other way and raising my eyes to her face as I drew level with her, but as though I had not in the least expected to see her. Indeed, for the first few mornings, so as to be sure of not missing her, I waited opposite the house. And every time that the carriage gate opened (letting out one after another so many people who were none of them she for whom I was waiting) its grinding rattle continued in my heart in a series of oscillations which it took me a long time to subdue. For never was devotee of a famous actress whom he did not know, posting himself and patrolling the pavement outside the stage door, never was angry or idolatrous crowd, gathered to insult or to carry in triumph through the streets the condemned assassin or the national hero whom it believes to be on the point of coming whenever a sound is heard from the inside of the prison or the palace, never were these so stirred by their emotion as I was, awaiting the emergence of this great lady who in her simple attire was able, by the grace of her movements (quite different from the gait she affected on entering a drawing-room or a box), to make of her morning walk—and for me there was no one in the world but herself out walking—a whole poem of elegant refinement and the finest ornament, the most curious flower of the season. But after the third day, so that the porter should not discover my stratagem, I betook myself much farther afield, to some point upon the Duchess's usual route. Often before that evening at the theatre I had made similar little excursions before luncheon when the weather was fine; if it had been raining, at the first gleam of sunshine I would hasten downstairs to take a turn, and if, suddenly, coming towards me, on the still wet pavement changed by the sun into a golden lacquer, in the transformation scene of a crossroads dusty with a grey mist which the sun tanned and gilded, I caught sight of a schoolgirl followed by her governess or of a dairy-maid with her white sleeves, I stood motionless, my hand pressed to my heart which was already leaping towards an unexplored form of life; I tried to bear in mind the street, the time, the number of the door through which the girl (whom I followed sometimes) had vanished and failed to reappear. Fortunately the fleeting nature of these cherished images, which I promised myself that I would make an effort to see again, prevented them from fixing themselves with any vividness in my memory. No matter, I was less sad now at the thought of my own ill health, of my never having summoned up courage to set to work, to begin a book, the world appeared to me now a pleasanter place to live in, life a more interesting experience now that I had learned that the streets of Paris, like the roads round Balbec, were aflower with those unknown beauties whom I had so often sought to evoke from the woods of Méséglise, each one of whom aroused a sensual longing which she alone appeared capable of assuaging.

On coming home from the Opéra-Comique I had added for next morning to the list of those which for some days past I had been hoping to meet again the form of Mme. de Guermantes, tall, with her high-piled crown of silky, golden hair; with the kindness promised me in the smile which she had directed at me from her cousin's box. I would follow the course which Françoise had told me that the Duchess generally took, and I would try at the same time, in the hope of meeting two girls whom I had seen a few days earlier, not to miss the break-up of their respective class and catechism. But in the mean time, ever and again, the scintillating smile of Mme. de Guermantes, the pleasant sensation it had given me, returned. And without exactly knowing what I was doing, I tried to find a place for them (as a woman studies the possible effect on her dress of some set of jewelled buttons that have just been given her) beside the romantic ideas which I had long held and which Albertine's coldness, Gisèle's premature departure, and before them my deliberate and too long sustained separation from Gilberte, had set free (the idea, for instance of being loved by a woman, of having a life in common with her); next, it had been the image of one or other of the two girls seen in the street that I brought into relation with those ideas, to which immediately afterwards I was trying to adapt my memory of the Duchess. Compared with those ideas my memory of Mme. de Guermantes at the Opéra-Comique was a very little thing, a tiny star twinkling beside the long tail of a blazing comet; moreover I had been quite familiar with the ideas long before I came to know Mme. de Guermantes; my memory of her, on the contrary, I possessed but imperfectly; every now and then it escaped me; it was during the hours when, from floating vaguely in my mind in the same way as the images of various other pretty women, it passed gradually into a unique and definite association —exclusive of every other feminine form—with those romantic ideas of so much longer standing than itself, it was during those few hours in which I remembered it most clearly that I ought to have taken steps to find out exactly what it was; but I did not then know the importance which it was to assume for me; it was pleasant merely as a first private meeting with Mme. de Guermantes inside myself, it was the first, the only accurate sketch, the only one taken from life, the only one that was really Mme.

de Guermantes; during the few hours in which I was fortunate enough to retain it without having the sense to pay it any attention, it must all the same have been charming, that memory, since it was always to it, and quite freely moreover, to that moment, without haste, without strain, without the slightest compulsion or anxiety, that my ideas of love returned; then, as gradually those ideas fixed it more definitely, it acquired from them a proportionately greater strength but itself became more vague; presently I could no longer recapture it; and in my dreams I probably altered it completely, for whenever I saw Mme. de Guermantes I realised the difference —never twice, as it happened, the same—between what I had imagined and what I saw. And now every morning, certainly at the moment when Mme. de Guermantes emerged from her gateway at the top of the street I saw again her tall figure, her face with its bright eyes and crown of silken hair—all the things for which I was there waiting; but, on the other hand, a minute or two later, when, having first turned my eyes away so as to appear not to be waiting for this encounter which I had come out to seek, I raised them to look at the Duchess at the moment in which we converged, what I saw then were red patches (as to which I knew not whether they were due to the fresh air or to a faulty complexion) on a sullen face which with the curtest of nods, a long way removed from the affability of the *Phèdre* evening, acknowledged my salute, which I addressed to her daily with an air of surprise, and which did not seem to please her. And yet, after a few days, during which the memory of the two girls fought against heavy odds for the mastery of my amorous feelings against that of Mme. de Guermantes, it was in the end the latter which, as though of its own accord, generally prevailed while its competitors withdrew; it was to it that I finally found myself, deliberately moreover, and as though by preference and for my own pleasure, to have transferred all my thoughts of love. I had ceased to dream of the little girls coming from their catechism, or of a certain dairy-maid; and yet I had also lost all hope of encountering in the street what I had come out to seek, either the affection promised to me, at the theatre, in a smile, or the profile, the bright face beneath its pile of golden hair which were so only when seen from afar. Now I should not even have been able to say what Mme. de Guermantes was like, by what I recognised her, for every day, in the picture which she presented as a whole, the face was different, as were the dress and the hat.

Why did I one morning, when I saw bearing down on me beneath a violet hood a sweet, smooth face whose charms were symmetrically arranged about a pair of blue eyes, a face in which the curve of the nose seemed to have been absorbed, gauge from a joyous commotion in my bosom that I was not going to return home without having caught a glimpse of Mme. de Guermantes; and on the next feel the same disturbance, affect the same indifference, turn away my eyes in the same careless manner as on the day before, on the apparition; seen in profile as she crossed from a side street and crowned by a navy-blue toque, of a beak-like nose bounding a flushed cheek chequered with a piercing eye, like some Egyptian deity? Once it was not merely a woman with a bird's beak that I saw but almost the bird itself; the outer garments, even the toque of Mme. de Guermantes were of fur, and since she thus left no cloth visible, she seemed naturally furred, like certain vultures whose thick, smooth, dusky, downy plumage suggests rather the skin of a wild beast. From the midst of this natural plumage, the tiny head arched out its beak and the two eyes on its surface were piercing-keen and blue.

One day I had been pacing up and down the street for hours on end without a vestige of Mme. de Guermantes when suddenly, inside a pastry-cook's shop tucked in between two of the mansions of this aristocratic and plebeian quarter, there appeared, took shape the vague and unfamiliar face of a fashionably dressed woman who was asking to see some little cakes, and, before I had had time to make her out, there shot forth at me like a lightning flash, reaching me sooner than its accompaniment of thunder, the glance of the Duchess; another time, having failed to meet her and hearing twelve strike, I realised that it was not worth my while to wait for her any longer, I was sorrowfully making my way homewards; and, absorbed in my own disappointment, looking absently after and not seeing a carriage that had overtaken me, I realised suddenly that the movement of her head which I saw a lady make through the carriage window was meant for me, and that this lady, whose features, relaxed and pale, or it might equally be tense and vivid, composed, beneath a round hat which nestled at the foot of a towering plume, the face of a stranger whom I had supposed that I did not know, was Mme. de Guermantes, by whom I had let myself be greeted without so much as acknowledging her bow. And sometimes I came upon her as I entered the gate, standing outside the lodge where the detestable porter whose scrutinous eye I loathed and dreaded was in the act of making her a profound obeisance and also, no doubt, his daily report. For the entire staff of the Guermantes household, hidden behind the window curtains, were trembling as they watched a conversation which they were unable to overhear, but which meant as they very well knew that one or other of them would certainly have his 'day out' stopped by the Duchess to whom this Cerberus was betraying him. In view of the whole series of different faces which Mme. Guermantes displayed thus one after another, faces that occupied a relative and varying extent, contracted one day, vast the next, in her person and attire as a whole, my love was not attached to any one of those changeable and ever-changing elements of flesh and fabric which replaced one another as day followed day, and which she could modify, could almost entirely reconstruct without altering my disturbance because beneath them, beneath the new collar and the strange cheek, I felt that it was still Mme. de Guermantes. What I loved was the invisible person who set all this outward show in motion, her whose hostility so distressed me, whose approach set me trembling, whose life I would fain have made my own and driven out of it her friends. She might flaunt a blue feather or shew a fiery cheek without her actions' losing their importance for me.

I should not myself have felt that Mme. de Guermantes was tired of meeting me day after day, had I not learned it indirectly by reading it on the face, stiff with coldness, disapproval and pity which Françoise shewed when she was helping me to get ready for these morning walks.

The moment I asked her for my outdoor things I felt a contrary wind arise in her worn and battered features. I made no attempt to win her confidence, for I knew that I should not succeed. She had, for at once discovering any unpleasant thing that might have happened to my parents or myself, a power the nature of which I have never been able to fathom. Perhaps it was not supernatural, but was to be explained by sources of information that were open to her alone: as it may happen that the news which often reaches a savage tribe several days before the post has brought it to the European colony has really been transmitted to them not by telepathy but from hill-top to hill-top by a chain of beacon fires. So, in the particular instance of my morning walks, possibly Mme. de Guermantes's servants had heard their mistress say how tired she was of running into me every day without fail wherever she went, and had repeated her remarks to Françoise. My parents might, it is true, have attached some servant other than Françoise to my person, still I should have been no better off. Françoise was in a sense less of a servant than the others. In her way of feeling things, of being kind and pitiful, hard and distant, superior and narrow, of combining a white skin with red hands, she was still the village maiden whose parents had had 'a place of their own' but having come to grief had been obliged to put her into service. Her presence in our household was the country air, the social life of a farm of fifty years ago wafted to us by a sort of reversal of the normal order of travel whereby it is the place that comes to visit the person. As the glass cases in a local museum are filled with specimens of the curious handiwork which the peasants still carve or embroider or whatever it may be in certain parts of the country, so our flat in Paris was decorated with the words of Françoise, inspired by a traditional local sentiment and governed by extremely ancient laws. And she could in Paris find her way back as though by clues of coloured thread to the songbirds and cherry trees of her childhood, to her mother's deathbed, which she still vividly saw. But in spite of all this wealth of background, once she had come to Paris and had entered our service she had acquired—as, obviously, anyone else coming there in her place would have acquired—the ideas, the system of interpretation used by the servants on the other floors, compensating for the respect which she was obliged to shew to us by repeating the rude words that the cook on the fourth floor had used to her mistress, with a servile gratification so intense that, for the first time in our lives, feeling a sort of solidarity between ourselves and the detestable occupant of the fourth floor flat, we said to ourselves that possibly we too were 'employers' after all. This alteration in Françoise's character was perhaps inevitable. Certain forms of existence are so abnormal that they are bound to produce certain characteristic faults; such was the life led by the King at Versailles among his courtiers, a life as strange as that of a Pharaoh or a Doge—and, far more even than his, the life of his courtiers. The life led by our servants is probably of an even more monstrous abnormality, which only its familiarity can prevent us from seeing. But it was actually in details more intimate still that I should have been obliged, if I had dismissed Françoise, to keep the same servant. For various others might, in years to come, enter my service; already furnished with the defects common to all servants, they underwent nevertheless a rapid transformation with me. As, in the rules of tactics, an attack in one sector compels a counter-attack in another, so as not to be hurt by the asperities of my nature, all of them effected in their own an identical resilience, always at the same points, and to make up for this took advantage of the gaps in my line to thrust out advanced posts. Of these gaps I knew nothing, any more than of the salients to which they gave rise, precisely because they were gaps. But my servants, by gradually becoming spoiled, taught me of their existence. It was from the defects which they invariably acquired that I learned what were my own natural and invariable shortcomings; their character offered me a sort of negative plate of my own. We had always laughed, my mother and I, at Mme. Sazerat, who used, in speaking of her servants, expressions like 'the lower orders' or 'the servant class.' But I am bound to admit that what made it useless to think of replacing Françoise by anyone else was that her successor would inevitably have belonged just as much to the race of servants in general and to the class of my servants in particular.

To return to Françoise, I never in my life experienced any humiliation without having seen beforehand on her face a store of condolences prepared and waiting; and if then in my anger at the thought of being pitied by her I tried to pretend that on the contrary I had scored a distinct success, my lies broke feebly on the wall of her respectful but obvious unbelief and the consciousness that she enjoyed of her own infallibility. For she knew the truth. She refrained from uttering it, and made only a slight movement with her lips as if she still had her mouth full and was finishing a tasty morsel. She refrained from uttering it, or so at least I long believed, for at that time I still supposed that it was by means of words that one communicated the truth to others. Indeed the words that people used to me recorded their meaning so unalterably on the sensitive plate of my mind that I could no more believe it to be possible that anyone who had professed to love me did not love me than Françoise herself could have doubted when she had read it in a newspaper that some clergyman or gentleman was prepared, on receipt of a stamped envelope, to furnish us free of charge with an infallible remedy for every known complaint or with the means of multiplying our income an hundredfold. (If, on the other hand, our doctor were to prescribe for her the simplest ointment to cure a cold in the head, she, so stubborn to endure the keenest suffering, would complain bitterly of what she had been made to sniff, insisting that it tickled her nose and that life was not worth living.) But she was the first person to prove to me by her example (which I was not to understand until, long afterwards, when it was given me afresh and to my greater discomfort, as will be found in the later volumes of this work, by a person who was dearer to me than Françoise) that the truth has no need to be uttered to be made apparent, and that one may perhaps gather it with more certainty, without waiting for words, without even bothering one's head about them, from a thousand outward signs, even from certain invisible phenomena, analogous in the sphere of human character to what in nature are atmospheric changes. I might perhaps have suspected this, since to myself at that time it frequently occurred that I said things in which there was no vestige of truth, while I made the real truth plain by all manner of involuntary confidences expressed by my body and in my actions (which were at once interpreted by Françoise); I ought perhaps to have suspected it, but to do so I should first have had to be conscious that I myself was occasionally untruthful and dishonest. Now untruthfulness and dishonesty were with me, as with most people, called into being in so immediate, so contingent a fashion, and in self-defence, by some particular interest, that my mind, fixed on some lofty ideal, allowed my character, in the darkness below, to set about those urgent, sordid tasks, and did not look down to observe them. When Françoise, in the evening, was polite to me, and asked my permission before sitting down in my room, it seemed as though her face became transparent and I could see the goodness and honesty that lay beneath. But Jupien, who had lapses into indiscretion of which I learned only later, revealed afterwards that she had told him that I was not worth the price of a rope to hang me, and that I had tried to insult her in every possible way. These words of Jupien set up at once before my eyes, in new and strange colours, a print of the picture of my relations with Françoise so different from that on which I used to like letting my eyes rest, and in which, without the least possibility of doubt, Françoise adored me and lost no opportunity of singing my praises, that I realised that it is not only the material world that is different from the aspect in which we see it; that all reality is perhaps equally dissimilar from what we think ourselves to be directly perceiving; that the trees, the sun and the sky would not be the same as what we see if they were apprehended by creatures having eyes differently constituted from ours, or, better still, endowed for that purpose with organs other than eyes which would furnish trees and sky and sun with equivalents, though not visual. However that might be, this sudden outlet which Jupien threw open for me upon the real world appalled me. So far it was only Françoise that was revealed, and of her I barely thought. Was it the same with all one's social relations? And in what depths of despair might this not some day plunge me, if it were the same with love? That was the future's secret. For the present only Françoise was concerned. Did she sincerely believe what she had said to Jupien? Had she said it to embroil Jupien with me, possibly so that we should not appoint Jupien's girl as her successor? At any rate I realised the impossibility of obtaining any direct and certain knowledge of whether Françoise loved or lothed me. And thus it was she who first gave me the idea that a person does not (as I had imagined) stand motionless and clear before our eyes with his merits, his defects, his plans, his intentions with regard to ourself exposed on his surface, like a garden at which, with all its borders spread out before us, we gaze through a railing, but is a shadow which we can never succeed in penetrating, of which there can be no such thing as direct knowledge, with respect to which we form countless beliefs, based upon his words and sometimes upon his actions, though neither words nor actions can give us anything but inadequate and as it proves contradictory information—a shadow behind which we can alternately imagine, with equal justification, that there burns the flame of hatred and of love.

I was genuinely in love with Mme. de Guermantes. The greatest happiness that I could have asked of God would have been that He should overwhelm her under every imaginable calamity, and that ruined, despised, stripped of all the privileges that divided her from me, having no longer any home of her own or people who would condescend to speak to her, she should come to me for refuge. I imagined her doing so. And indeed on those evenings when some change in the atmosphere or in my own condition brought to the surface of my consciousness some forgotten scroll on which were recorded impressions of other days, instead of profiting by the refreshing strength that had been generated in me, instead of employing it to decipher in my own mind thoughts which as a rule escaped me, instead of setting myself at last to work, I preferred to relate aloud, to plan out in the third person, with a flow of invention as useless as was my declamation of it, a whole novel crammed with adventure, in which the Duchess, fallen upon misfortune, came to implore assistance from me—me who had become, by a converse change of circumstances, rich and powerful. And when I had let myself thus for hours on end imagine the circumstances, rehearse the sentences with which I should welcome the Duchess beneath my roof, the situation remained unaltered; I had, alas, in reality, chosen to love the very woman who, in her own person, combined perhaps the greatest possible number of different advantages; in whose eyes, accordingly, I could not hope, myself, ever to cut any figure; for she was as rich as the richest commoner—and noble also; without reckoning that personal charm which set her at the pinnacle of fashion, made her among the rest a sort of queen.

I felt that I was annoying her by crossing her path in this way every morning; but even if I had had the courage to refrain, for two or three days consecutively, from doing so, perhaps that abstention, which would have represented so great a sacrifice on my part, Mme. de Guermantes would not have noticed, or would have set it down to some obstacle beyond my control. And indeed I could not have succeeded in making myself cease to track her down except by arranging that it should be impossible for me to do so, for the need incessantly reviving in me to meet her, to be for a moment the object of her attention, the person to whom her bow was addressed, was stronger than my fear of arousing her displeasure. I should have had to go away for some time; and for that I had not the heart. I did think of it more than once. I would then tell Françoise to pack my boxes, and immediately afterwards to unpack them. And as the spirit of imitation, the desire not to appear behind the times, alters the most natural and most positive form of oneself, Françoise, borrowing the expression from her daughter's vocabulary, used to remark that I was 'dippy.' She did not approve of this; she said that I was always 'balancing,' for she made use, when she was not aspiring to rival the moderns, of the language of Saint-Simon. It is true that she liked it still less when I spoke to her as master to servant. She knew that this was not natural to me, and did not suit me, a condition which she rendered in words as 'where there isn't a will.' I should never have had the heart to leave Paris except in a direction that would bring me closer to Mme. de Guermantes. This was by no means an impossibility. Should I not indeed find myself nearer to her than I was in the morning, in the street, solitary, abashed, feeling that not a single one of the thoughts which I should have liked to convey to her ever reached her, in that weary patrolling up and down of walks which might be continued, day after day, for ever without the slightest advantage to myself, if I were to go miles away from Mme. de Guermantes, but go to some one of her acquaintance, some one whom she knew to be particular in the choice of his friends and who would appreciate my good qualities, would be able to speak to her about me, and if not to obtain it from her at least to make her know what I wanted, some one by means of whom, in any event, simply because I should discuss with him whether or not it would be possible for him to convey this or that message to her, I should give to my solitary and silent meditations a new form, spoken, active, which would seem an advance, almost a realisation. What she did during the mysterious daily life of the 'Guermantes' that she was—this was the constant object of my thoughts; and to break through the mystery, even by indirect means, as with a lever, by employing the services of a person to whom were not forbidden the town house of the Duchess, her parties, unrestricted conversation with her, would not that be a contact more distant but at the same time more effective than my contemplation of her every morning in the street?

The friendship, the admiration that Saint-Loup felt for me seemed to me undeserved and had hitherto left me unmoved. All at once I attached a value to them, I would have liked him to disclose them to Mme. de Guermantes, I was quite prepared even to ask him to do so. For when we are in love, all the trifling little privileges that we enjoy we would like to be able to divulge to the woman we love, as people who have been disinherited and bores of other kinds do to us in everyday life. We are distressed by her ignorance of them; we seek consolation in the thought that just because they are never visible she has perhaps added to the opinion which she already had of us this possibility of further advantages that must remain unknown.

Saint-Loup had not for a long time been able to come to Paris, whether, as he himself explained, on account of his military duties, or, as was more likely, on account of the trouble that he was having with his mistress, with whom he had twice now been on the point of breaking off relations. He had often told me what a pleasure it would be to him if I came to visit him at that garrison town, the name of which, a couple of days after his leaving Balbec, had caused me so much joy when I had read it on the envelope of the first letter I received from my friend. It was (not so far from Balbec as its wholly inland surroundings might have led one to think) one of those little fortified towns, aristocratic and military, set in a broad expanse of country over which on fine days there floats so often into the distance a sort of intermittent haze of sound which—as a screen of poplars by its sinuosities outlines the course of a river which one cannot see—indicates the movements of a regiment on parade, so that the very atmosphere of its streets, avenues and squares has been gradually tuned to a sort of perpetual vibration, musical and martial, while the most ordinary note of cartwheel or tramway is prolonged in vague trumpet calls, indefinitely repeated, to the hallucinated ear, by the silence. It was not too far away from Paris for me to be able, if I took the express, to return, join my mother and grandmother and sleep in my own bed. As soon as I realised this, troubled by a painful longing, I had too little will power to decide not to return to Paris but rather to stay in this town; but also too little to prevent a porter from carrying my luggage to a cab and not to adopt, as I walked behind him, the unburdened mind of a traveller who is looking after his luggage and for whom no grandmother is waiting anywhere at home, to get into the carriage with the complete detachment of a person who, having ceased to think of what it is that he wants, has the air of knowing what he wants, and to give the driver the address of the cavalry barracks. I thought that Saint-Loup might come to sleep that night at the hotel at which I should be staying, so as to make less painful for me the first shock of contact with this strange town. One of the guard went to find him, and I waited at the barrack gate, before that huge ship of stone, booming with the November wind, out of which, every moment, for it was now six o'clock, men were emerging in pairs into the street, staggering as if they were coming ashore in some foreign port in which they found themselves temporarily anchored.

Saint-Loup appeared, moving like a whirlwind, his eyeglass spinning in the air before him; I had not given my name, I was eager to enjoy his surprise and delight. "Oh! What a bore!" he exclaimed, suddenly catching sight of me, and blushing to the tips of his ears. "I have just had a week's leave, and I shan't be off duty again for another week."

And, preoccupied by the thought of my having to spend this first night alone, for he knew better than anyone my bed-time agonies, which he had often remarked and soothed at Balbec, he broke off his lamentation to turn and look at me, coax me with little smiles, with tender though unsymmetrical glances, half of them coming directly from his eye, the other half through his eyeglass, but both sorts alike an allusion to the emotion that he felt on seeing me again, an allusion also to that important matter which I did not always understand but which concerned me now vitally, our friendship.

"I say! Where are you going to sleep? Really, I can't recommend the hotel where we mess; it is next to the Exhibition ground, where there's a show just starting; you'll find it beastly crowded. No, you'd better go to the Hôtel de Flandre; it is a little eighteenth-century palace with old tapestries. It 'makes' quite an 'old-world residence.' "

Saint-Loup employed in every connexion the word 'makes' for 'has the air of,' because the spoken language, like the written, feels from time to time the need of these alterations in the meanings of words, these refinements of expression. And just as journalists often have not the least idea from what school of literature come the 'turns of speech' that they borrow, so the vocabulary, the very diction of Saint-Loup were formed in imitation of three different aesthetes, none of whom he knew personally but whose way of speaking had been indirectly instilled into him. "Besides," he concluded, "the hotel I mean is more or less adapted to your supersensitiveness of hearing. You will have no neighbours. I quite see that it is a slender advantage, and as, after all, another visitor may arrive to-morrow, it would not be worth your while to choose that particular hotel with so precarious an object in view. No, it is for its appeal to the eye that I recommend it. The rooms are quite attractive, all the furniture is old and comfortable; there is something reassuring about that." But to me, less of an artist than Saint-Loup, the pleasure that an attractive house could give was superficial, almost non-existent, and could not calm my growing anguish, as painful as that which I used to feel long ago at Combray when my mother did not come upstairs to say good night, or that which I felt on the evening of my arrival at Balbec in the room with the unnaturally high ceiling, which smelt of flowering grasses. Saint-Loup read all this in my fixed gaze.

"A lot you care, though, about this charming palace, my poor fellow; you're quite pale; and here am I like a great brute talking to you about tapestries which you won't have the heart to look at, even. I know the room they'll put you in; personally I find it most enlivening, but I can quite understand that it won't have the same effect on you with your sensitive nature. You mustn't think I don't understand; I don't feel the same myself, but I can put myself in your place."

At that moment a serjeant who was exercising a horse on the square, entirely absorbed in making the animal jump, disregarding the salutes of passing troopers, but hurling volleys of oaths at such as got in his way, turned with a smile to Saint-Loup and, seeing that he had a friend with him, saluted us. But his horse at once reared. Saint-Loup flung himself at its head, caught it by the bridle, succeeded in quieting it and returned to my side.

"Yes," he resumed; "I assure you that I fully understand; I feel for you as keenly as you do yourself. I am wretched," he went on, laying his hand lovingly on my shoulder, "when I think that if I could have stayed with you to-night, I might have been able, if we talked till morning, to relieve you of a little of your unhappiness. I can lend you any number of books, but you won't want to read if you're feeling like that. And I shan't be able to get anyone else to take my duty here; I've been off now twice running because my girl came down to see me."

And he knitted his brows partly with vexation and also in the effort to decide, like a doctor, what remedy he might best apply to my disease.

"Run along and light the fire in my quarters," he called to a trooper who passed us. "Hurry up; get a move on!"

After which he turned once more to me, and his eyeglass and his peering, myopic gaze hinted an allusion to our great friendship.

"No! To see you here, in these barracks where I have spent so much time thinking about you, I can scarcely believe my eyes. I must be dreaming. And how are you? Better, I hope. You must tell me all about yourself presently. We'll go up to my room; we mustn't hang about too long on the square, there's the devil of a draught; I don't feel it now myself, but you aren't accustomed to it, I'm afraid of your catching cold. And what about your work; have you started yet? No? You are a quaint fellow! If I had your talent I'm sure I should be writing morning, noon and night. It amuses you more to do nothing? What a pity it is that it's the useless fellows like me who are always ready to work, and the ones who could if they wanted to, won't. There, and I've clean forgotten to ask you how your grandmother is. Her Proudhons are in safe keeping. I never part from them."

An officer, tall, handsome, majestic, emerged with slow and solemn gait from the foot of a staircase. Saint-Loup saluted him and arrested the perpetual instability of his body for the moment occupied in holding his hand against the peak of his cap. But he had flung himself into the action with so much force, straightening himself with so sharp a movement, and, the salute ended, let his hand fall with so abrupt a relaxation, altering all the positions of shoulder, leg, and eyeglass, that this moment was one not so much of immobility as of a throbbing tension in which were neutralised the excessive movements which he had just made and those on which he was about to embark. Meanwhile the officer, without coming any nearer us, calm, benevolent, dignified, imperial, representing, in short, the direct opposite of Saint-Loup, himself also, but without haste, raised his hand to the peak of his cap.

"I must just say a word to the Captain," whispered Saint-Loup. "Be a good fellow, and go and wait for me in my room. It's the second on the right, on the third floor; I'll be with you in a minute."

And setting off at the double, preceded by his eyeglass which fluttered in every direction, he made straight for the slow and stately Captain whose horse had just been brought round and who, before preparing to mount, was giving orders with a studied nobility of gesture as in some historical painting, and as though he were setting forth to take part in some battle of the First Empire, whereas he was simply going to ride home, to the house which he had taken for the period of his service at Doncières, and which stood in a Square that was named, as though in an ironical anticipation of the arrival of this Napoleonid, Place de la République. I started to climb the staircase, nearly slipping on each of its nail-studded steps, catching glimpses of barrack-rooms, their bare walls edged with a double line of beds and kits. I was shewn Saint-Loup's room. I stood for a moment outside its closed door, for I could hear some one stirring; he moved something, let fall something else; I felt that the room was not empty, that there must be somebody there. But it was only the freshly lighted fire beginning to burn. It could not keep quiet, it kept shifting its faggots about, and very clumsily. I entered the room; it let one roll into the fender and set another smoking. And even when it was not moving, like an ill-bred person it made noises all the time, which, from the moment I saw the flames rising, revealed themselves to me as noises made by a fire, although if I had been on the other side of a wall I should have thought that they came from some one who was blowing his nose and walking about. I sat down in the room and waited. Liberty hangings and old German stuffs of the eighteenth century managed to rid it of the smell that was exhaled by the rest of the building, a coarse, insipid, mouldy smell like that of stale toast. It was here, in this charming room, that I could have dined and slept with a calm and happy mind. Saint-Loup seemed almost to be present by reason of the text-books which littered his table, between his photographs, among which I could make out my own and that of the Duchesse de Guermantes, by the light of the fire which had at length grown accustomed to the grate, and, like an animal crouching in an ardent, noiseless, faithful watchfulness, let fall only now and then a smouldering log which crumbled into sparks, or licked with a tongue of flame the sides of the chimney. I heard the tick of Saint-Loup's watch, which could not be far away. This tick changed its place every moment, for I could not see the watch; it seemed to come from behind, from in front of me, from my right, from my left, sometimes to die away as though at a great distance. Suddenly I caught sight of the watch on the table. Then I heard the tick in a fixed place from which it did not move again. That is to say, I thought I heard it at this place; I did not hear it there; I saw it there, for sounds have no position in space. Or rather we associate them with movements, and in that way they serve the purpose of warning us of those movements, of appearing to make them necessary and natural. Certainly it happens commonly enough that a sick man whose ears have been stopped with cotton-wool ceases to hear the noise of a fire such as was crackling at that moment in Saint-Loup's fireplace, labouring at the formation of brands and cinders, which it then lets fall into the fender, nor would he hear the passage of the tramway-cars whose music took its flight, at regular intervals, over the Grand'place of Doncières. Let the sick man then read a book, and the pages will turn silently before him, as though they were moved by the fingers of a god. The dull thunder of a bath which is being filled becomes thin, faint and distant as the twittering of birds in the sky. The withdrawal of sound, its dilution, take from it all its power to hurt us; driven mad a moment ago by hammer-blows which seemed to be shattering the ceiling above our head, it is with a quiet delight that we now gather in their sound, light, caressing, distant, like the murmur of leaves playing by the roadside with the passing breeze. We play games of patience with cards which we do not hear, until we imagine that we have not touched them, that they are moving of their own accord, and, anticipating our desire to play with them, have begun to play with us. And in this connexion we may ask ourselves whether, in the case of love (to which indeed we may add the love of life and the love of fame, since there are, it appears, persons who are acquainted with these latter sentiments), we ought not to act like those who, when a noise disturbs them, instead of praying that it may cease, stop their ears; and, with them for our pattern, bring our attention, our defensive strength to bear on ourselves, give ourselves as an objective to capture not the 'other person' with whom we are in love but our capacity for suffering at that person's hands.

To return to the problem of sounds, we have only to thicken the wads which close the aural passages, and they confine to a pianissimo the girl who has just been playing a boisterous tune overhead; if we go farther, and steep the wad in grease, at once the whole household must obey its despotic rule; its laws extend even beyond our portals. Pianissimo is not enough; the wad instantly orders the piano to be shut, and the music lesson is abruptly ended; the gentleman who was walking up and down in the room above breaks off in the middle of his beat; the movement of carriages and tramways is interrupted as though a Sovereign were expected to pass. And indeed this attenuation of sounds sometimes disturbs our slumbers instead of guarding them. Only yesterday the incessant noise in our ears, by describing to us in a continuous narrative all that was happening in the street and in the house, succeeded at length in making us sleep, like a boring book; to-night, through the sheet of silence that is spread over our sleep a shock, louder than the rest, manages to make itself heard, gentle as a sigh, unrelated to any other sound, mysterious; and the call for an explanation which it emits is sufficient to awaken us. Take away for a moment from the sick man the cotton-wool that has been stopping his ears and in a flash the full daylight, the sun of sound dawns afresh, dazzling him, is born again in his universe; in all haste returns the multitude of exiled sounds; we are present, as though it were the chanting of choirs of angels, at the resurrection of the voice. The empty streets are filled for a moment with the whirr of the swift, consecutive wings of the singing tramway-cars. In the bedroom itself, the sick man has created, not, like Prometheus, fire, but the sound of fire. And when we increase or reduce the wads of cotton-wool, it is as though we were pressing alternately one and the other of the two pedals with which we have extended the resonant compass of the outer world.

Only there are also suppressions of sound which are not temporary. The man who has grown completely deaf cannot even heat a pan of milk by his bedside, but he must keep an eye open to watch, on the tilted lid, for the white, arctic reflexion, like that of a coming snowstorm, which is the warning sign which he is wise to obey, by cutting off (as Our Lord bade the waves be still) the electric current; for already the swelling, jerkily climbing egg of boiling milk-film is reaching its climax in a series of sidelong movements, has filled and set bellying the drooping sails with which the cream has skimmed its surface, sends in a sudden storm a scud of pearly substance flying overboard—sails which the cutting off of the current, if the electric storm is hushed in time, will fold back upon themselves and let fall with the ebbing tide, changed now to magnolia petals. But if the sick man should not be quick enough in taking the necessary precautions, presently, when his drowned books and watch are seen barely emerging from the milky tide, he will be obliged to call the old nurse who, though he be himself an eminent statesman or a famous writer, will tell him that he has no more sense than a child of five. At other times in the magic chamber, between us and the closed door, a person who was not there a moment ago makes his appearance; it is a visitor whom we did not hear coming in, and who merely gesticulates, like a figure in one of those little puppet theatres, so restful for those who have taken a dislike to the spoken tongue. And for this totally deaf man, since the loss of a sense adds as much beauty to the world as its acquisition, it is with ecstasy that he walks now upon an earth grown almost an Eden, in which sound has not yet been created. The highest waterfalls unfold for his eyes alone their ribbons of crystal, stiller than the glassy sea, like the cascades of Paradise. As sound was for him before his deafness the perceptible form in which the cause of a movement was draped, objects moved without sound seemed to be being moved also without cause; deprived of all resonant quality, they shew a spontaneous activity, seem to be alive. They move, halt, become alight of their own accord. Of their own accord they vanish in the air like the winged monsters of prehistoric days. In the solitary and unneighboured home of the deaf man the service which, before his infirmity was complete, was already shewing an increased discretion, was being carried on in silence, is now assured him with a sort of surreptitious deftness, by mutes, as at the court of a fairy-tale king. And, as upon the stage, the building on which the deaf man looks from his window—be it barracks, church, or town hall—is only so much scenery. If one day it should fall to the ground, it may emit a cloud of dust and leave visible ruins; but, less material even than a palace on the stage, though it has not the same exiguity, it will subside in the magic universe without letting the fall of its heavy blocks of stone tarnish, with anything so vulgar as sound, the chastity of the prevailing silence.

The silence, though only relative, which reigned in the little barrack-room where I sat waiting was now broken. The door opened and Saint-Loup, dropping his eyeglass, dashed in.

"Ah, my dear Robert, you make yourself very comfortable here," I said to him; "how jolly it would be if one were allowed to dine and sleep here."

And to be sure, had it not been against the regulations, what repose untinged by sadness I could have tasted there, guarded by that atmosphere of tranquillity, vigilance and gaiety which was maintained by a thousand wills controlled and free from care, a thousand heedless spirits, in that great community called a barracks where, time having taken the form of action, the sad bell that tolled the hours outside was replaced by the same joyous clarion of those martial calls, the ringing memory of which was kept perpetually alive in the paved streets of the town, like the dust that floats in a sunbeam;—a voice sure of being heard, and musical because it was the command not only of authority to obedience but of wisdom to happiness.

"So you'd rather stay with me and sleep here, would you, than to go the hotel by yourself?" Saint-Loup asked me, smiling.

"Oh, Robert, it is cruel of you to be sarcastic about it," I pleaded; "you know it's not possible, and you know how wretched I shall be over there."

"Good! You flatter me!" he replied. "It occurred to me just now that you would rather stay here to-night. And that is precisely what I stopped to ask the Captain."

"And he has given you leave?" I cried.

"He hadn't the slightest objection."

"Oh! I adore him!"

"No; that would be going too far. But now, let me just get hold of my batman and tell him to see about our dinner," he went on, while I turned away so as to hide my tears.

We were several times interrupted by one or other of Saint-Loup's friends' coming in. He drove them all out again.

"Get out of here. Buzz off!"

I begged him to let them stay.

"No, really; they would bore you stiff; they are absolutely uncultured; all they can talk about is racing, or stables shop. Besides, I don't want them here either; they would spoil these precious moments I've been looking forward to. But you mustn't think, when I tell you that these fellows are brainless, that everything military is devoid of intellectuality. Far from it. We have a major here who is a splendid chap. He's given us a course in which military history is treated like a demonstration, like a problem in algebra. Even from the aesthetic point of view there is a curious beauty, alternately inductive and deductive, about it which you couldn't fail to appreciate."

"That's not the officer who's given me leave to stay here to-night?"

"No; thank God! The man you 'adore' for so very trifling a service is the biggest fool that ever walked the face of the earth. He is perfect at looking after messing, and at kit inspections; he spends hours with the serjeant major and the master tailor. There you have his mentality. Apart from that he has a vast contempt, like everyone here, for the excellent major I was telling you about. No one will speak to him because he's a freemason and doesn't go to confession. The Prince de Borodino would never have an outsider like that in his house. Which is pretty fair cheek, when all's said and done, from a man whose great-grandfather was a small farmer, and who would probably be a small farmer himself if it hadn't been for the Napoleonic wars. Not that he hasn't a lurking sense of his own rather ambiguous position in society, where he's neither flesh nor fowl. He hardly ever shews his face at the Jockey, it makes him feel so deuced awkward, this so-called Prince," added Robert, who, having been led by the same spirit of imitation to adopt the social theories of his teachers and the worldly prejudices of his relatives, had unconsciously wedded the democratic love of humanity to a contempt for the nobility of the Empire.

I was looking at the photograph of his aunt, and the thought that, since Saint-Loup had this photograph in his possession, he might perhaps give it to me, made me feel all the fonder of him and hope to do him a thousand services, which seemed to me a very small exchange for it. For this photograph was like one encounter more, added to all those that I had already had, with Mme. de Guermantes; better still, a prolonged encounter, as if, by some sudden stride forward in our relations, she had stopped beside me, in a garden hat, and had allowed me for the first time to gaze at my leisure at that plump cheek, that arched neck, that tapering eyebrow (veiled from me hitherto by the swiftness of her passage, the bewilderment of my impressions, the imperfection of memory); and the contemplation of them, as well as of the bare bosom and arms of a woman whom I had never seen save in a high-necked and long-sleeved bodice, was to me a voluptuous discovery, a priceless favour. Those lines, which had seemed to me almost a forbidden spectacle, I could study there, as in a text-book of the only geometry that had any value for me. Later on, when I looked at Robert, I noticed that he too was a little like the photograph of his aunt, and by a mysterious process which I found almost as moving, since, if his face had not been directly created by hers, the two had nevertheless a common origin. The features of the Duchesse de Guermantes, which were pinned to my vision of Combray, the nose like a falcon's beak, the piercing eyes, seemed to have served also as a pattern for the cutting out—in another copy analogous and slender, with too delicate a skin—of Robert's face, which might almost be superimposed upon his aunt's. I saw in him, with a keen longing, those features characteristic of the Guermantes, of that race which had remained so individual in the midst of a world with which it was not confounded, in which it remained isolated in the glory of an ornithomorphic divinity, for it seemed to have been the issue, in the age of mythology, of the union of a goddess with a bird.

Robert, without being aware of its cause, was touched by my evident affection. This was moreover increased by the sense of comfort inspired in me by the heat of the fire and by the champagne which bedewed at the same time my brow with beads of sweat and my cheeks with tears; it washed down the partridges; I ate mine with the dumb wonder of a profane mortal of any sort when he finds in a form of life with which he is not familiar what he has supposed that form of life to exclude—the wonder, for instance, of an atheist who sits down to an exquisitely cooked dinner in a presbytery. And next morning, when I awoke, I rose and went to cast from Saint-Loup's window, which being at a great height overlooked the whole countryside, a curious scrutiny to make the acquaintance of my new neighbour, the landscape which I had not been able to distinguish the day before, having arrived too late, at an hour when it was already sleeping beneath the outspread cloak of night. And yet, early as it had awoken from its sleep, I could see the ground, when I opened the window and looked out, only as one sees it from the window of a country house, overlooking the lake, shrouded still in its soft white morning gown of mist which scarcely allowed me to make out anything at all. But I knew that, before the troopers who were busy with their horses in the square had finished grooming them, it would have cast its gown aside. In the meantime, I could see only a meagre hill, rearing close up against the side of the barracks a back already swept clear of darkness, rough and wrinkled. Through the transparent curtain of frost I could not take my eyes from this stranger who, too, was looking at me for the first time. But when I had formed the habit of coming to the barracks, my consciousness that the hill was there, more real, consequently, even when I did not see it, than the hotel at Balbec, than our house in Paris, of which I thought as of absent—or dead—friends, that is to say without any strong belief in their existence, brought it about that, even although I was not aware of it myself, its reflected shape outlined itself on the slightest impressions that I formed at Doncières, and among them, to begin with this first morning, on the pleasing impression of warmth given me by the cup of chocolate prepared by Saint-Loup's batman in this comfortable room, which had the effect of being an optical centre from which to look out at the hill—the idea of there being anything else to do but just gaze at it, the idea of actually climbing it, being rendered impossible by this same mist. Imbibing the shape of the hill, associated with the taste of hot chocolate and with the whole web of my fancies at that particular time, this mist, without my having thought at all about it, succeeded in moistening all my subsequent thoughts about that period, just as a massive and unmelting lump of gold had remained allied to my impressions of Balbec, or as the proximity of the outside stairs of blackish sandstone gave a grey background to my impressions of Combray. It did not, however, persist late into the day; the sun began by hurling at it, in vain, a few darts which sprinkled it with brilliants before they finally overcame it. The hill might expose its grizzled rump to the sun's rays, which, an hour later, when I went down to the town, gave to the russet tints of the autumn leaves, to the reds and blues of the election posters pasted on the walls, an exaltation which raised my spirits also and made me stamp, singing as I went, on the pavements from which I could hardly keep myself from jumping in the air for joy.

But after that first night I had to sleep at the hotel. And I knew beforehand that I was doomed to find sorrow there. It was like an unbreathable aroma which all my life long had been exhaled for me by every new bedroom, that is to say by every bedroom; in the one which I usually occupied I was not present, my mind remained elsewhere, and in its place sent only the sense of familiarity. But I could not employ this servant, less sensitive than myself, to look after things for me in a new place, where I preceded him, where I arrived by myself, where I must bring into contact with its environment that 'Self' which I rediscovered only at year-long intervals, but always the same, having not grown at all since Combray, since my first arrival at Balbec, weeping, without any possibility of consolation, on the edge of an unpacked trunk.

As it happened, I was mistaken. I had no time to be sad, for I was not left alone for an instant. The fact of the matter was that there remained of the old palace a superfluous refinement of structure and decoration, out of place in a modern hotel, which, released from the service of any practical purpose, had in its long spell of leisure acquired a sort of life: passages winding about in all directions, which one was continually crossing in their aimless wanderings, lobbies as long as corridors and as ornate as drawing-rooms, which had the air rather of being dwellers there themselves than of forming part of a dwelling, which could not be induced to enter and settle down in any of the rooms but wandered about outside mine and came up at once to offer me their company—neighbours of a sort, idle but never noisy, menial ghosts of the past who had been granted the privilege of staying, provided they kept quiet, by the doors of the rooms which were let to visitors, and who, every time that I came across them, greeted me with a silent deference. In short, the idea of a lodging, of simply a case for our existence from day to day which shields us only from the cold and from being overlooked by other people, was absolutely inapplicable to this house, an assembly of rooms as real as a colony of people, living, it was true, in silence, but things which one was obliged to meet, to avoid, to appreciate, as one came in. One tried not to disturb them, and one could not look without respect at the great drawing-room which had formed, far back in the eighteenth century, the habit of stretching itself at its ease, among its hangings of old gold and beneath the clouds of its painted ceiling. And one was seized with a more personal curiosity as to the smaller rooms which, without any regard for symmetry, ran all round it, innumerable, startled, fleeing in disorder as far as the garden, to which they had so easy an access down three broken steps.

If I wished to go out or to come in without taking the lift or being seen from the main staircase, a smaller private staircase, no longer in use, offered me its steps so skilfully arranged, one close above another, that there seemed to exist in their gradation a perfect proportion of the same kind as those which, in colours, scents, savours, often arouse in us a peculiar, sensuous pleasure. But the pleasure to be found in going up and downstairs I had had to come here to learn, as once before to a health resort in the Alps to find that the act—as a rule not noticed—of drawing breath could be a perpetual delight. I received that dispensation from effort which is granted to us only by the things to which long use has accustomed us, when I set my feet for the first time on those steps, familiar before ever I knew them, as if they possessed, deposited on them, perhaps, embodied in them by the masters of long ago whom they used to welcome every day, the prospective charm of habits which I had not yet contracted and which indeed could only grow weaker once they had become my own. I looked into a room; the double doors closed themselves behind me, the hangings let in a silence in which I felt myself invested with a sort of exhilarating royalty; a marble mantelpiece with ornaments of wrought brass—of which one would have been wrong to think that its sole idea was to represent the art of the Directory—offered me a fire, and a little easy chair on short legs helped me to warm myself as comfortably as if I had been sitting on the hearthrug. The walls held the room in a close embrace, separating it from the rest of the world and, to let in, to enclose what made it complete, parted to make way for the bookcase, reserved a place for the bed, on either side of which a column airily upheld the raised ceiling of the alcove. And the room was prolonged in depth by two closets as large as itself, the latter of which had hanging from its wall, to scent the occasion on which one had recourse to it, a voluptuous rosary of orris-roots; the doors, if I left them open when I withdrew into this innermost retreat, were not content with tripling its dimensions without its ceasing to be well-proportioned, and not only allowed my eyes to enjoy the delights of extension after those of concentration, but added further to the pleasure of my solitude, which, while still inviolable, was no longer shut in, the sense of liberty. This closet looked out upon a courtyard, a fair solitary stranger whom I was glad to have for a neighbour when next morning my eyes fell on her, a captive between her high walls in which no other window opened, with nothing but two yellowing trees which were enough to give a pinkish softness to the pure sky above.

Before going to bed I decided to leave the room in order to explore the whole of my fairy kingdom. I walked down a long gallery which did me homage successively with all that it had to offer me if I could not sleep, an armchair placed waiting in a corner, a spinet, on a table against the wall, a bowl of blue crockery filled with cinerarias, and, in an old frame, the phantom of a lady of long ago whose powdered hair was starred with blue flowers, holding in her hand a bunch of carnations. When I came to the end, the bare wall in which no door opened said to me simply "Now you must turn and go back, but, you see, you are at home here, the house is yours," while the soft carpet, not to be left out, added that if I did not sleep that night I could easily come in barefoot, and the unshuttered windows, looking out over the open country, assured me that they would hold a sleepless vigil and that, at whatever hour I chose to come in, I need not be afraid of disturbing anyone. And behind a hanging curtain I surprised only a little closet which, stopped by the wall and unable to escape any farther, had hidden itself there with a guilty conscience and gave me a frightened stare from its little round window, glowing blue in the moonlight. I went to bed, but the presence of the eiderdown quilt, of the pillars, of the neat fireplace, by straining my attention to a pitch beyond that of Paris, prevented me from letting myself go upon my habitual train of fancies. And as it is this particular state of strained attention that enfolds our slumbers, acts upon them, modifies them, brings them into line with this or that series of past impressions, the images that filled my dreams that first night were borrowed from a memory entirely distinct from that on which I was in the habit of drawing. If I had been tempted while asleep to let myself be swept back upon my ordinary current of remembrance, the bed to which I was not accustomed, the comfortable attention which I was obliged to pay to the position of my various limbs when I turned over, were sufficient to correct my error, to disentangle and to keep running the new thread of my dreams. It is the same with sleep as with our perception of the external world. It needs only a modification in our habits to make it poetic, it is enough that while undressing we should have dozed off unconsciously upon the bed, for the dimensions of our dream-world to be altered and its beauty felt. We awake, look at our watch, see 'four o'clock'; it is only four o'clock in the morning, but we imagine that the whole day has gone by, so vividly does this nap of a few minutes, unsought by us, appear to have come down to us from the skies, by virtue of some divine right, full-bodied, vast, like an Emperor's orb of gold. In the morning, while worrying over the thought that my grandfather was ready, and was waiting for me to start on our walk along the Méséglise way, I was awakened by the blare of a regimental band which passed every day beneath my windows. But on several occasions—and I mention these because one cannot properly describe human life unless one shews it soaked in the sleep in which it plunges, which, night after night, sweeps round it as a promontory is encircled by the sea—the intervening layer of sleep was strong enough to bear the shock of the music and I heard nothing. On the other mornings it gave way for a moment; but, still velvety with the refreshment of having slept, my consciousness (like those organs by which, after a local anaesthetic, a cauterisation, not perceived at first, is felt only at the very end and then as a faint burning smart) was touched only gently by the shrill points of the fifes which caressed it with a vague, cool, matutinal warbling; and after this brief interruption in which the silence had turned to music it relapsed into my slumber before even the dragoons had finished passing, depriving me of the latest opening buds of the sparkling clangorous nosegay. And the zone of my consciousness which its springing stems had brushed was so narrow, so circumscribed with sleep that later on, when Saint-Loup asked me whether I had heard the band, I was no longer certain that the sound of its brasses had not been as imaginary as that which I heard during the day echo, after the slightest noise, from the paved streets of the town. Perhaps I had heard it only in a dream, prompted by my fear of being awakened, or else of not being awakened and so not seeing the regiment march past. For often, when I was still asleep at the moment when, on the contrary, I had supposed that the noise would awaken me, for the next hour I imagined that I was awake, while still drowsing, and I enacted to myself with tenuous shadow-shapes on the screen of my slumber the various scenes of which it deprived me but at which I had the illusion of looking on.

What one has meant to do during the day, as it turns out, sleep intervening, one accomplishes only in one's dreams, that is to say after it has been distorted by sleep into following another line than one would have chosen when awake. The same story branches off and has a different ending. When all is said, the world in which we live when we are asleep is so different that people who have difficulty in going to sleep seek first of all to escape from the waking world. After having desperately, for hours on end, with shut eyes, revolved in their minds thoughts similar to those which they would have had with their eyes open, they take heart again on noticing that the last minute has been crawling under the weight of an argument in formal contradiction of the laws of thought, and their realisation of this, and the brief 'absence' to which it points, indicate that the door is now open through which they will perhaps be able, presently, to escape from the perception of the real, to advance to a resting-place more or less remote on the other side, which will mean their having a more or less 'good' night. But already a great stride has been made when we turn our back on the real, when we reach the cave in which 'auto-suggestions' prepare—like witches—the hell-broth of imaginary maladies or of the recurrence of nervous disorders, and watch for the hour at which the storm that has been gathering during our unconscious sleep will break with sufficient force to make sleep cease.

Not far thence is the secret garden in which grow like strange flowers the kinds of sleep, so different one from another, the sleep induced by datura, by the multiple extracts of ether, the sleep of belladonna, of opium, of valerian, flowers whose petals remain shut until the day when the predestined visitor shall come and, touching them, bid them open, and for long hours inhale the aroma of their peculiar dreams into a marvelling and bewildered being. At the end of the garden stands the convent with open windows through which we hear voices repeating the lessons learned before we went to sleep, which we shall know only at the moment of awakening; while, a presage of that moment, sounds the resonant tick of that inward alarum which our preoccupation has so effectively regulated that when our housekeeper comes in with the warning: "It is seven o'clock," she will find us awake and ready. On the dim walls of that chamber which opens upon our dreams, within which toils without ceasing that oblivion of the sorrows of love whose task, interrupted and brought to nought at times by a nightmare big with reminiscence, is ever speedily resumed, hang, even after we are awake, the memories of our dreams, but so overshadowed that often we catch sight of them for the first time only in the broad light of the afternoon when the ray of a similar idea happens by chance to strike them; some of them brilliant and harmonious while we slept, but already so distorted that, having failed to recognise them, we can but hasten to lay them in the earth like dead bodies too quickly decomposed or relics so seriously damaged, so nearly crumbling into dust that the most skilful restorer could not bring them back to their true form or make anything of them. Near the gate is the quarry to which our heavier slumbers repair in search of substances which coat the brain with so unbreakable a glaze that, to awaken the sleeper, his own will is obliged, even on a golden morning, to smite him with mighty blows like a young Siegfried. Beyond this, again, are the nightmares of which the doctors foolishly assert that they tire us more than does insomnia, whereas on the contrary they enable the thinker to escape from the strain of thought; those nightmares with their fantastic picture-books in which our relatives who are dead are shewn meeting with a serious accident which at the same time does not preclude their speedy recovery. Until then we keep them in a little rat-cage, in which they are smaller than white mice and, covered with big red spots, out of each of which a feather sprouts, engage us in Ciceronian dialogues. Next to this picture-book is the revolving disc of awakening, by virtue of which we submit for a moment to the tedium of having to return at once to a house which was pulled down fifty years ago, the memory of which is gradually effaced as sleep grows more distant by a number of others, until we arrive at that memory which the disc presents only when it has ceased to revolve and which coincides with what we shall see with opened eyes.

Sometimes I had heard nothing, being in one of those slumbers into which we fall as into a pit from which we are heartily glad to be drawn up a little later, heavy, overfed, digesting all that has been brought to us (as by the nymphs who fed the infant Hercules) by those agile, vegetative powers whose activity is doubled while we sleep.

That kind of sleep is called 'sleeping like lead,' and it seems as though one has become, oneself, and remains for a few moments after such a sleep is ended, simply a leaden image. One is no longer a person. How then, seeking for one's mind, one's personality, as one seeks for a thing that is lost, does one recover one's own self rather than any other? Why, when one begins again to think, is it not another personality than yesterday's that is incarnate in one? One fails to see what can dictate the choice, or why, among the millions of human beings any one of whom one might be, it is on him who one was overnight that unerringly one lays one's hand? What is it that guides us, when there has been an actual interruption—whether it be that our unconsciousness has been complete or our dreams entirely different from ourselves? There has indeed been death, as when the heart has ceased to beat and a rhythmical friction of the tongue revives us. No doubt the room, even if we have seen it only once before, awakens memories to which other, older memories cling. Or were some memories also asleep in us of which we now become conscious? The resurrection at our awakening—after that healing attack of mental alienation which is sleep—must after all be similar to what occurs when we recapture a name, a line, a refrain that we had forgotten. And perhaps the resurrection of the soul after death is to be conceived as a phenomenon of memory.

When I had finished sleeping, tempted by the sunlit sky—but discouraged by the chill—of those last autumn mornings, so luminous and so cold, in which winter begins, to get up and look at the trees on which the leaves were indicated now only by a few strokes, golden or rosy, which seemed to have been left in the air, on an invisible web, I raised my head from the pillow and stretched my neck, keeping my body still hidden beneath the bedclothes; like a chrysalis in the process of change I was a dual creature, with the different parts of which a single environment did not agree; for my eyes colour was sufficient, without warmth; my chest on the other hand was anxious for warmth and not for colour. I rose only after my fire had been lighted, and studied the picture, so delicate and transparent, of the pink and golden morning, to which I had now added by artificial means the element of warmth that it lacked, poking my fire which burned and smoked like a good pipe and gave me, as a pipe would have given me, a pleasure at once coarse because it was based upon a material comfort and delicate because beyond it was printed a pure vision. The walls of my dressing-room were covered with a paper on which a violent red background was patterned with black and white flowers, to which it seemed that I should have some difficulty in growing accustomed. But they succeeded only in striking me as novel, in forcing me to enter not into conflict but into contact with them, in modulating the gaiety, the songs of my morning toilet, they succeeded only in imprisoning me in the heart of a sort of poppy, out of which to look at a world which I saw quite differently from in Paris, from the gay screen which was this new dwelling-place, of a different aspect from the house of my parents, and into which flowed a purer air. On certain days, I was agitated by the desire to see my grandmother again, or by the fear that she might be ill, or else it was the memory of some undertaking which I had left half-finished in Paris, and which seemed to have made no progress; sometimes again it was some difficulty in which, even here, I had managed to become involved. One or other of these anxieties had kept me from sleeping, and I was without strength to face my sorrow which in a moment grew to fill the whole of my existence. Then from the hotel I sent a messenger to the barracks, with a line to Saint-Loup: I told him that, should it be materially possible—I knew that it was extremely difficult for him—I should be most grateful if he would look in for a minute. An hour later he arrived; and on hearing his ring at the door I felt myself liberated from my obsessions. I knew that, if they were stronger than I, he was stronger than they, and my attention was diverted from them and concentrated on him who would have to settle them. He had come into the room, and already he had enveloped me in the gust of fresh air in which from before dawn he had been displaying so much activity, a vital atmosphere very different from that of my room, to which I at once adapted myself by appropriate reactions.

"I hope you weren't angry with me for bothering you; there is something that is worrying me, as you probably guessed."

"Not at all; I just supposed you wanted to see me, and I thought it very nice of you. I was delighted that you should have sent for me. But what is the trouble? Things not going well? What can I do to help?"

He listened to my explanations, and gave careful answers; but before he had uttered a word he had transformed me to his own likeness; compared with the important occupations which kept him so busy, so alert, so happy, the worries which, a moment ago, I had been unable to endure for another instant seemed to me as to him negligible; I was like a man who, not having been able to open his eyes for some days, sends for a doctor, who neatly and gently raises his eyelid, removes from beneath it and shews him a grain of sand; the sufferer is healed and comforted. All my cares resolved themselves into a telegram which Saint-Loup undertook to dispatch. Life seemed to me so different, so delightful; I was flooded with such a surfeit of strength that I longed for action.

"What are you doing now?" I asked him.

"I must leave you, I'm afraid; we're going on a route march in three quarters of an hour, and I have to be on parade."

"Then it's been a great bother to you, coming here?"

"No, no bother at all, the Captain was very good about it; he told me that if it was for you I must go at once; but you understand, I don't like to seem to be abusing the privilege."

"But if I got up and dressed quickly and went by myself to the place where you'll be training, it would interest me immensely, and I could perhaps talk to you during the breaks."

"I shouldn't advise you to do that; you have been lying awake, racking your brains over a thing which, I assure you, is not of the slightest importance, but now that it has ceased to worry you, lay your head down on the pillow and go to sleep, which you will find an excellent antidote to the demineralisation of your nerve-cells; only you mustn't go to sleep too soon, because our band-boys will be coming along under your windows; but as soon as they've passed I think you'll be left in peace, and we shall meet again this evening, at dinner."

But soon I was constantly going to see the regiment being trained in field operations, when I began to take an interest in the military theories which Saint-Loup's friends used to expound over the dinner-table, and when it had become the chief desire of my life to see at close quarters their various leaders, just as a person who makes music his principal study and spends his life in the concert halls finds pleasure in frequenting the cafés in which one mingles with the life of the members of the orchestra. To reach the training ground I used to have to take tremendously long walks. In the evening after dinner the longing for sleep made my head drop every now and then as in a swoon. Next morning I realised that I had no more heard the band than, at Balbec, after the evenings on which Saint-Loup had taken me to dinner at Rivebelle, I used to hear the concert on the beach. And at the moment when I wished to rise I had a delicious feeling of incapacity; I felt myself fastened to a deep, invisible ground by the articulations (of which my tiredness made me conscious) of muscular and nutritious roots. I felt myself full of strength; life seemed to extend more amply before me; this was because I had reverted to the good tiredness of my childhood at Combray on the mornings following days on which we had taken the Guermantes walk. Poets make out that we recapture for a moment the self that we were long ago when we enter some house or garden in which we used to live in our youth. But these are most hazardous pilgrimages, which end as often in disappointment as in success. The fixed places, contemporary with different years, it is in ourselves that we should rather seek to find them. This is where the advantage comes in, to a certain extent, of great exhaustion followed by a good night's rest. Good nights, to make us descend into the most subterranean galleries of sleep, where no reflexion from overnight, no gleam of memory comes to lighten the inward monologue (if so be that it cease not also), turn so effectively the soil and break through the surface stone of our body that we discover there, where our muscles dive down and throw out their twisted roots and breathe the air of the new life, the garden in which as a child we used to play. There is no need to travel in order to see it again; we must dig down inwardly to discover it. What once covered the earth is no longer upon it but beneath; a mere excursion does not suffice for a visit to the dead city, excavation is necessary also. But we shall see how certain impressions, fugitive and fortuitous, carry us back even more effectively to the past, with a more delicate precision, with a flight more light-winged, more immaterial, more headlong, more unerring, more immortal than these organic dislocations.

Sometimes my exhaustion was greater still; I had, without any opportunity of going to bed, been following the operations for several days on end. How blessed then was my return to the hotel! As I got into bed I seemed to have escaped at last from the hands of enchanters, sorcerers like those who people the 'romances' beloved of our forebears in the seventeenth century. My sleep that night and the lazy morning that followed it were no more than a charming fairy tale. Charming; beneficent perhaps also. I reminded myself that the keenest sufferings have their place of sanctuary, that one can always, when all else fails, find repose. These thoughts carried me far.

On days when, although there was no parade, Saint-Loup had to stay in barracks, I used often to go and visit him there. It was a long way; I had to leave the town and cross the viaduct, from either side of which I had an immense view. A strong breeze blew almost always over this high ground, and filled all the buildings erected on three sides of the barrack-square, which howled incessantly like a cave of the winds. While I waited for Robert—he being engaged on some duty or other—outside the door of his room or in the mess, talking to some of his friends to whom he had introduced me (and whom later on I came now and then to see, even when he was not to be there), looking down from the window three hundred feet to the country below, bare now except where recently sown fields, often still soaked with rain and glittering in the sun, shewed a few stripes of green, of the brilliance and translucent limpidity of enamel, I could hear him discussed by the others, and I soon learned what a popular favourite he was. Among many of the volunteers, belonging to other squadrons, sons of rich business or professional men who looked at the higher aristocratic society only from outside and without penetrating its enclosure, the attraction which they naturally felt towards what they knew of Saint-Loup's character was reinforced by the distinction that attached in their eyes to the young man whom, on Saturday evenings, when they went on pass to Paris, they had seen supping in the Café de la Paix with the Duc d'Uzès and the Prince d'Orléans. And on that account, into his handsome face, his casual way of walking and saluting officers, the perpetual dance of his eyeglass, the affectation shewn in the cut of his service dress—the caps always too high, the breeches of too fine a cloth and too pink a shade—they had introduced the idea of a 'tone' which, they were positive, was lacking in the best turned-out officers in the regiment, even the majestic Captain to whom I had been indebted for the privilege of sleeping in barracks, who seemed, in comparison, too pompous and almost common.

One of them said that the Captain had bought a new horse. "He can buy as many horses as he likes. I passed Saint-Loup on Sunday morning in the Allée des Acacias; now he's got some style on a horse!" replied his companion, and knew what he was talking about, for these young fellows belonged to a class which, if it does not frequent the same houses and know the same people, yet, thanks to money and leisure, does not differ from the nobility in its experience of all those refinements of life which money can procure. At any rate their refinement had, in the matter of clothes, for instance, something about it more studied, more impeccable than that free and easy negligence which had so delighted my grandmother in Saint-Loup. It gave quite a thrill to these sons of big stockbrokers or bankers, as they sat eating oysters after the theatre, to see at an adjoining table Serjeant Saint-Loup. And what a tale there was to tell in barracks on Monday night, after a week-end leave, by one of them who was in Robert's squadron, and to whom he had said how d'ye do 'most civilly,' while another, who was not in the same squadron, was quite positive that, in spite of this, Saint-Loup had recognised him, for two or three times he had put up his eyeglass and stared in the speaker's direction.

"Yes, my brother saw him at the Paix," said another, who had been spending the day with his mistress; "my brother says his dress coat was cut too loose and didn't fit him."

"What was the waistcoat like?"

"He wasn't wearing a white waistcoat; it was purple, with sort of palms on it; stunning!"

To the 'old soldiers' (sons of the soil who had never heard of the Jockey Club and simply put Saint-Loup in the category of ultra-rich non-commissioned officers, in which they included all those who, whether bankrupt or not, lived in a certain style, whose income or debts ran into several figures, and who were generous towards their men), the gait, the eyeglass, the breeches, the caps of Saint-Loup, even if they saw in them nothing particularly aristocratic, furnished nevertheless just as much interest and meaning. They recognised in these peculiarities the character, the style which they had assigned once and for all time to this most popular of the 'stripes' in the regiment, manners like no one's else, scornful indifference to what his superior officers might think, which seemed to them the natural corollary of his goodness to his subordinates. The morning cup of coffee in the canteen, the afternoon 'lay-down' in the barrack-room seemed pleasanter, somehow, when some old soldier fed the hungering, lazy section with some savoury titbit as to a cap in which Saint-Loup had appeared on parade.

"It was the height of my pack."

"Come off it, old chap, you don't expect us to believe that; it couldn't have been the height of your pack," interrupted a young college graduate who hoped by using these slang terms not to appear a 'learned beggar,' and by venturing on this contradiction to obtain confirmation of a fact the thought of which enchanted him.

"Oh, so it wasn't the height of my pack, wasn't it? You measured it, I suppose! I tell you this much, the C. O. glared at it as if he'd have liked to put him in clink. But you needn't think the great Saint-Loup felt squashed; no, he went and he came, and down with his head and up with his head, and that blinking glass screwed in his eye all the time. We'll see what the 'Capstan' has to say when he hears. Oh, very likely he'll say nothing, but you may be sure he won't be pleased. But there's nothing so wonderful about that cap. I hear he's got thirty of 'em and more at home, at his house in town."

"Where did you hear that, old man? From our blasted corporal-dog?" asked the young graduate, pedantically displaying the new forms of speech which he had only recently acquired and with which he took a pride in garnishing his conversation.

"Where did I hear it? From his batman; what d'you think?"

"Ah! Now you're talking. That's a chap who knows when he's well off!"

"I should say so! He's got more in his pocket than I have, certain sure! And besides he gives him all his own things, and everything. He wasn't getting his grub properly, he says. Along comes de Saint-Loup, and gives cooky hell: 'I want him to be properly fed, d'you hear,' he says, 'and I don't care what it costs.'"

The old soldier made up for the triviality of the words quoted by the emphasis of his tone, in a feeble imitation of the speaker which had an immense success.

On leaving the barracks I would take a stroll, and then, to fill up the time before I went, as I did every evening, to dine with Saint-Loup at the hotel in which he and his friends had established their mess, I made for my own, as soon as the sun had set, so as to have a couple of hours in which to rest and read. In the square, the evening light bedecked the pepper-pot turrets of the castle with little pink clouds which matched the colour of the bricks, and completed the harmony by softening the tone of the latter where it bathed them. So strong a current of vitality coursed through my nerves that no amount of movement on my part could exhaust it; each step I took, after touching a stone of the pavement, rebounded off it. I seemed to have growing on my heels the wings of Mercury. One of the fountains was filled with a ruddy glow, while in the other the moonlight had already begun to turn the water opalescent. Between them were children at play, uttering shrill cries, wheeling in circles, obeying some necessity of the hour, like swifts or bats. Next door to the hotel, the old National Courts and the Louis XVI orangery, in which were installed now the savings-bank and the Army Corps headquarters, were lighted from within by the palely gilded globes of their gas-jets which, seen in the still clear daylight outside, suited those vast, tall, eighteenth-century windows from which the last rays of the setting sun had not yet departed, as would have suited a complexion heightened with rouge a head-dress of yellow tortoise-shell, and persuaded me to seek out my fireside and the lamp which, alone in the shadowy front of my hotel, was striving to resist the gathering darkness, and for the sake of which I went indoors before it was quite dark, for pleasure, as to an appetising meal. I kept, when I was in my room, the same fulness of sensation that I had felt outside. It gave such an apparent convexity of surface to things which as a rule seem flat and empty, to the yellow flame of the fire, the coarse blue paper on the ceiling, on which the setting sun had scribbled corkscrews and whirligigs, like a schoolboy with a piece of red chalk, the curiously patterned cloth on the round table, on which a ream of essay paper and an inkpot lay in readiness for me, with one of Bergotte's novels, that ever since then these things have continued to seem to me to be enriched with a whole form of existence which I feel that I should be able to extract from them if it were granted me to set eyes on them again. I thought with joy of the barracks that I had just left and of their weather-cock turning with every wind that blew. Like a diver breathing through a pipe which rises above the surface of the water, I felt that I was in a sense maintaining contact with a healthy, open-air life when I kept as a baiting-place those barracks, that towering observatory, dominating a country-side furrowed with canals of green enamel, into whose various buildings I esteemed as a priceless privilege, which I hoped would last, my freedom to go whenever I chose, always certain of a welcome.

At seven o'clock I dressed myself and went out again to dine with Saint-Loup at the hotel where he took his meals. I liked to go there on foot. It was by now pitch dark, and after the third day of my visit there began to blow, as soon as night had fallen, an icy wind which seemed a harbinger of snow. As I walked, I ought not, strictly speaking, to have ceased for a moment to think of Mme. de Guermantes; it was only in the attempt to draw nearer to her that I had come to visit Robert's garrison. But a memory, a grief, are fleeting things. There are days when they remove so far that we are barely conscious of them, we think that they have gone for ever. Then we pay attention to other things. And the streets of this town had not yet become for me what streets are in the place where one is accustomed to live, simply means of communication between one part and another. The life led by the inhabitants of this unknown world must, it seemed to me, be a marvellous thing, and often the lighted windows of some dwelling-house kept me standing for a long while motionless in the darkness by laying before my eyes the actual and mysterious scenes of an existence into which I might not penetrate. Here the fire-spirit displayed to me in purple colouring the booth of a chestnut seller in which a couple of serjeants, their belts slung over the backs of chairs, were playing cards, never dreaming that a magician's wand was making them emerge from the night, like a transparency on the stage, and presenting them in their true lineaments at that very moment to the eyes of an arrested passer-by whom they could not see. In a little curiosity shop a candle, burned almost to its socket, projecting its warm glow over an engraving reprinted it in sanguine, while, battling against the darkness, the light of the big lamp tanned a scrap of leather, inlaid a dagger with fiery spangles, on pictures which were only bad copies spread a priceless film of gold like the patina of time or the varnish used by a master, made in fact of the whole hovel, in which there was nothing but pinchbeck rubbish, a marvellous composition by Rembrandt. Sometimes I lifted my gaze to some huge old dwelling-house on which the shutters had not been closed and in which amphibious men and women floated slowly to and fro in the rich liquid that after nightfall rose incessantly from the wells of the lamps to fill the rooms to the very brink of the outer walls of stone and glass, the movement of their bodies sending through it long unctuous golden ripples. I proceeded on my way, and often, in the dark alley that ran past the cathedral, as long ago on the road to Méséglise, the force of my desire caught and held me; it seemed that a woman must be on the point of appearing, to satisfy it; if, in the darkness, I felt suddenly brush past me a skirt, the violence of the pleasure which I then felt made it impossible for me to believe that the contact was accidental and I attempted to seize in my arms a terrified stranger. This gothic alley meant for me something so real that if I had been successful in raising and enjoying a woman there, it would have been impossible for me not to believe that it was the ancient charm of the place that was bringing us together, and even though she were no more than a common street-walker, stationed there every evening, still the wintry night, the strange place, the darkness, the mediaeval atmosphere would have lent her their mysterious glamour. I thought of what might be in store for me; to try to forget Mme. de Guermantes seemed to me a dreadful thing, but reasonable, and for the first time possible, easy perhaps even. In the absolute quiet of this neighbourhood I could hear ahead of me shouted words and laughter which must come from tipsy revellers staggering home. I waited to see them, I stood peering in the direction from which I had heard the sound. But I was obliged to wait for some time, for the surrounding silence was so intense that it allowed to travel with the utmost clearness and strength sounds that were still a long way off. Finally the revellers did appear; not, as I had supposed, in front of me, but ever so far behind. Whether the intersection of sidestreets, the interposition of buildings had, by reverberation, brought about this acoustic error, or because it is very difficult to locate a sound when the place from which it comes is not known, I had been as far wrong over direction as over distance.

The wind grew stronger. It was thick and bristling with coming snow. I returned to the main street and jumped on board the little tramway-car on which, from its platform, an officer, without apparently seeing them, was acknowledging the salutes of the loutish soldiers who trudged past along the pavement, their faces daubed crimson by the cold, reminding me, in this little town which the sudden leap from autumn into early winter seemed to have transported farther north, of the rubicund faces which Breughel gives to his merry, junketing, frostbound peasants.

And sure enough at the hotel where I was to meet Saint-Loup and his friends and to which the fair now beginning had attracted a number of people from near and far, I found, as I hurried across the courtyard with its glimpses of glowing kitchens in which chickens were turning on spits, pigs were roasting, lobsters being flung, alive, into what the landlord called the 'everlasting fire,' an influx (worthy of some *Numbering of the People Before Bethlehem* such as the old Flemish masters used to paint) of new arrivals who assembled there in groups, asking the landlord or one of his staff (who, if he did not like the look of them, would recommend lodgings elsewhere in the town) whether they could have dinner and beds, while a scullion hurried past holding a struggling fowl by the neck. And similarly, in the big dining-room which I crossed the first day before coming to the smaller room in which my friend was waiting for me, it was of some feast in the Gospels portrayed with a mediaeval simplicity and an exaggeration typically Flemish that one was reminded by the quantity of fish, pullets, grouse, woodcock, pigeons, brought in dressed and garnished and piping hot by breathless waiters who slid over the polished floor to gain speed and set them down on the huge carving table where they were at once cut up but where—for most of the people had nearly finished dinner when I arrived—they accumulated untouched, as though their profusion and the haste of those who brought them in were due not so much to the requirements of the diners as to respect for the sacred text, scrupulously followed in the letter but quaintly illustrated by real details borrowed from local custom, and to an aesthetic and religious scruple for making evident to the eye the solemnity of the feast by the profusion of the victuals and the assiduity of the servers. One of these stood lost in thought at the far end of the room by a sideboard; and to find out from him, who alone appeared calm enough to be capable of answering me, in which room our table had been laid, making my way forward among the chafing-dishes that had been lighted here and there to keep the late comers' plates from growing cold (which did not, however, prevent the dessert, in the centre of the room, from being piled on the outstretched hands of a huge mannikin, sometimes supported on the wings of a duck, apparently of crystal, but really of ice, carved afresh every day with a hot iron by a sculptor-cook, quite in the Flemish manner), I went straight—at the risk of being knocked down by his colleagues—towards this servitor, in whom I felt that I recognised a character who is traditionally present in all these sacred subjects, for he reproduced with scrupulous accuracy the blunt features, fatuous and ill-drawn, the musing expression, already half aware of the miracle of a divine presence which the others have not yet begun to suspect. I should add that, in view probably of the coming fair, this presentation was strengthened by a celestial contingent, recruited in mass, of cherubim and seraphim. A young angel musician, whose fair hair enclosed a fourteen-year-old face, was not, it was true, playing on any instrument, but stood musing before a gong or a pile of plates, while other less infantile angels flew swiftly across the boundless expanse of the room, beating the air with the ceaseless fluttering of the napkins which fell along the lines of their bodies like the wings in 'primitive' paintings, with pointed ends. Fleeing those ill-defined regions, screened by a hedge of palms through which the angelic servitors looked, from a distance, as though they had floated down out of the empyrean, I explored my way to the smaller room in which Saint-Loup's table was laid. I found there several of his friends who dined with him regularly, nobles except for one or two commoners in whom the young nobles had, in their school days, detected likely friends, and with whom they readily associated, proving thereby that they were not on principle hostile to the middle class, even though it were Republican, provided it had clean hands and went to mass. On the first of these evenings, before we sat down to dinner, I drew Saint-Loup into a corner and, in front of all the rest but so that they should not hear me, said to him:

"Robert, this is hardly the time or the place for what I am going to say, but I shan't be a second. I keep on forgetting to ask you when I'm in the barracks; isn't that Mme. de Guermantes's photograph that you have on your table?"

"Why, yes; my good aunt."

"Of course she is; what a fool I am; you told me before that she was; I'd forgotten all about her being your aunt. I say, your friends will be getting impatient, we must be quick, they're looking at us; another time will do; it isn't at all important."

"That's all right; go on as long as you like. They can wait."

"No, no; I do want to be polite to them; they're so nice; besides, it doesn't really matter in the least, I assure you."

"Do you know that worthy Oriane, then?"

This 'worthy Oriane,' as he might have said, 'that good Oriane,' did not imply that Saint-Loup regarded Mme. de Guermantes as especially good. In this instance the words 'good,' 'excellent,' 'worthy' are mere reinforcements of the demonstrative 'that,' indicating a person who is known to both parties and of whom the speaker does not quite know what to say to someone outside the intimate circle. The word 'good' does duty as a stopgap and keeps the conversation going for a moment until the speaker has hit upon "Do you see much of her?" or "I haven't set eyes on her for months," or "I shall be seeing her on Tuesday," or "She must be getting on, now, you know."

"I can't tell you how funny it is that it should be her photograph, because we're living in her house now, in Paris, and I've been hearing the most astounding things" (I should have been hard put to it to say what) "about her, which have made me immensely interested in her, only from a literary point of view, don't you know, from a—how shall I put it—from a Balzacian point of view; but you're so clever you can see what I mean;

I don't need to explain things to you; but we must hurry up; what on earth will your friends think of my manners?"

"They will think absolutely nothing; I have told them that you are sublime, and they are a great deal more alarmed than you are."

"You are too kind. But listen, what I want to say is this: I suppose Mme. de Guermantes hasn't any idea that I know you, has she?"

"I can't say; I haven't seen her since the summer, because I haven't had any leave since she's been in town."

"What I was going to say is this: I've been told that she looks on me as an absolute idiot."

"That I do not believe; Oriane is not exactly an eagle, but all the same she's by no means stupid."

"You know that, as a rule, I don't care about your advertising the good opinion you're kind enough to hold of me; I'm not conceited. That's why I'm sorry you should have said flattering things about me to your friends here (we will go back to them in two seconds). But Mme. de Guermantes is different; if you could let her know—if you would even exaggerate a trifle—what you think of me, you would give me great pleasure."

"Why, of course I will, if that's all you want me to do; it's not very difficult; but what difference can it possibly make to you what she thinks of you? I suppose you think her no end of a joke, really; anyhow, if that's all you want we can discuss it in front of the others or when we are by ourselves; I'm afraid of your tiring yourself if you stand talking, and it's so inconvenient too, when we have heaps of opportunities of being alone together."

It was precisely this inconvenience that had given me courage to approach Robert; the presence of the others was for me a pretext that justified my giving my remarks a curt and incoherent form, under cover of which I could more easily dissemble the falsehood of my saying to my friend that I had forgotten his connexion with the Duchess, and also did not give him time to frame—with regard to my reasons for wishing that Mme. de Guermantes should know that I was his friend, was clever, and so forth—questions which would have been all the more disturbing in that I should not have been able to answer them.

"Robert, I'm surprised that a man of your intelligence should fail to understand that one doesn't discuss the things that will give one's friends pleasure; one does them. Now I, if you were to ask me no matter what, and indeed I only wish you would ask me to do something for you, I can assure you I shouldn't want any explanations. I may ask you for more than I really want; I have no desire to know Mme. de Guermantes, but just to test you I ought to have said that I was anxious to dine with Mme. de Guermantes; I am sure you would never have done it."

"Not only should I have done it, I will do it."

"When?"

"Next time I'm in Paris, three weeks from now, I expect."

"We shall see; I dare say she won't want to see me, though. I can't tell you how grateful I am."

"Not at all; it's nothing."

"Don't say that; it's everything in the world, because now I can see what sort of friend you are; whether what I ask you to do is important or not, disagreeable or not, whether I am really keen about it or ask you only as a test, it makes no difference; you say you will do it, and there you shew the fineness of your mind and heart. A stupid friend would have started a discussion."

Which was exactly what he had just been doing; but perhaps I wanted to flatter his self-esteem; perhaps also I was sincere, the sole touchstone of merit seeming to me to be the extent to which a friend could be useful in respect of the one thing that seemed to me to have any importance, namely my love. Then I went on, perhaps from cunning, possibly from a genuine increase of affection inspired by gratitude, expectancy, and the copy of Mme. de Guermantes's very features which nature had made in producing her nephew Robert: "But, I say, we mustn't keep them waiting any longer, and I've mentioned only one of the two things I wanted to ask you, the less important; the other is more important to me, but I'm afraid you will never consent. Would it bore you if we were to call each other *tu*?"

"Bore me? My dear fellow! Joy! Tears of joy! Undreamed-of happiness!"

"Thank you—*tu* I mean; you begin first—ever so much. It is such a pleasure to me that you needn't do anything about Mme. de Guermantes if you'd rather not, this is quite enough for me."

"I can do both."

"I say, Robert! Listen to me a minute," I said to him later while we were at dinner. "Oh, it's really too absurd the way our conversation is always being interrupted, I can't think why—you remember the lady I was speaking to you about just now."

"Yes."

"You're quite sure you know who' I mean?"

"Why, what do you take me for, a village idiot?"

"You wouldn't care to give me her photograph, I suppose?"

I had meant to ask him only for the loan of it. But when the time came to speak I felt shy, I decided that the request was indiscreet, and in order to hide my confusion I put the question more bluntly, and increased my demand, as if it had been quite natural.

"No; I should have to ask her permission first," was his answer.

He blushed as he spoke. I could see that he had a reservation in his mind, that he credited me also with one, that he would give only a partial service to my love, under the restraint of certain moral principles, and for this I hated him.

At the same time I was touched to see how differently Saint-Loup behaved towards me now that I was no longer alone with him, and that his friends formed an audience. His increased affability would have left me cold had I thought that it was deliberately assumed; but I could feel that it was spontaneous and consisted only of all that he had to say about me in my absence and refrained as a rule from saying when we were together by ourselves. In our private conversations I might certainly suspect the pleasure that he found in talking to me, but that pleasure he almost always left unexpressed. Now, at the same remarks from me which, as a rule, he enjoyed without shewing it, he watched from the corner of his eye to see whether they produced on his friends the effect on which he had counted, an effect corresponding to what he had promised them beforehand. The mother of a girl in her first season could be no more unrelaxing in her attention to her daughter's responses and to the attitude of the public. If I had made some remark at which, alone in my company, he would merely have smiled, he was afraid that the others might not have seen the point, and put in a "What's that?" to make me repeat what I had said, to attract attention, and turning at once to his friends and making himself automatically, by facing them with a hearty laugh, the fugleman of their laughter, presented me for the first time with the opinion that he actually held of me and must often have expressed to them. So that I caught sight of myself suddenly from without, like a person who reads his name in a newspaper or sees himself in a mirror.

It occurred to me, one of these evenings, to tell a mildly amusing story about Mme. Blandais, but I stopped at once, remembering that Saint-Loup knew it already, and that when I had tried to tell him it on the day following my arrival he had interrupted me with: "You told me that before, at Balbec." I was surprised, therefore, to find him begging me to go on and assuring me that he did not know the story, and that it would amuse him immensely. "You've forgotten it for the moment," I said to him, "but you'll remember as I go on." "No, really; I swear you're mistaken. You've never told me. Do go on." And throughout the story he fixed a feverish and enraptured gaze alternately on myself and on his friends. I realised only after I had finished, amid general laughter, that it had struck him that this story would give his friends a good idea of my wit, and that it was for this reason that he had pretended not to know it. Such is the stuff of friendship.

On the third evening, one of his friends, to whom I had not had an opportunity before of speaking, conversed with me at great length; and I overheard him telling Saint-Loup how much he had been enjoying himself. And indeed we sat talking together almost all evening, leaving our glasses of sauterne untouched on the table before us, isolated, sheltered from the others by the sumptuous curtains of one of those intuitive sympathies between man and man which, when they are not based upon any physical attraction, are the only kind that is altogether mysterious. Of such an enigmatic nature had seemed to me, at Balbec, that feeling which Saint-Loup had for me, which was not to be confused with the interest of our conversations, a feeling free from any material association, invisible, intangible, and yet a thing of the presence of which in himself, like a sort of inflammatory gas, he had been so far conscious as to refer to it with a smile. And yet there was perhaps something more surprising still in this sympathy born here in a single evening, like a flower that had budded and opened in a few minutes in the warmth of this little room. I could not help asking Robert when he spoke to me about Balbec whether it were really settled that he was to marry Mlle. d'Ambresac. He assured me that not only was it not settled, but there had never been any thought of such a match, he had never seen her, he did not know who she was. If at that moment I had happened to see any of the social gossipers who had told me of this coming event, they would promptly have announced the betrothal of Mlle. d'Ambresac to some one who was not Saint-Loup and that of Saint-Loup to some one who was not Mlle. d'Ambresac. I should have surprised them greatly had I reminded them of their incompatible and still so recent predictions. In order that this little game may continue, and multiply false reports by attaching the greatest possible number to every name in turn, nature has furnished those who play it with a memory as short as their credulity is long.

Saint-Loup had spoken to me of another of his friends who was present also, one with whom he was on particularly good terms just then, since they were the only two advocates in their mess of the retrial of Dreyfus.

Just as a brother of this friend of Saint-Loup, who had been trained at the Schola Cantorum, thought about every new musical work not at all what his father, his mother, his cousins, his club friends thought, but exactly what the other students thought at the Schola, so this non-commissioned nobleman (of whom Bloch formed an extraordinary opinion when I told him about him, because, touched to hear that he belonged to the same party as himself, he nevertheless imagined him on account of his aristocratic birth and religious and military upbringing to be as different as possible, endowed with the same romantic attraction as a native of a distant country) had a 'mentality,' as people were now beginning to say, analogous to that of the whole body of Dreyfusards in general and of Bloch in particular, on which the traditions of his family and the interests of his career could retain no hold whatever. Similarly one of Saint-Loup's cousins had married a young Eastern princess who was said to write poetry quite as fine as Victor Hugo's or Alfred de Vigny's, and in spite of this was supposed to have a different type of mind from what one would naturally expect, the mind of an Eastern princess immured in an Arabian Nights palace. For the writers who had the privilege of meeting her was reserved the disappointment or rather the joy of listening to conversation which gave the impression not of Scheherazade but of a person of genius of the type of Alfred de Vigny or Victor Hugo.

"That fellow? Oh, he's not like Saint-Loup, he's a regular devil," my new friend informed me; "he's not even straight about it. At first, he used to say: 'Just wait a little, there's a man I know well, a clever, kind-hearted fellow, General de Boisdeffre; you need have no hesitation in accepting his decision.' But as soon as he heard that Boisdeffre had pronounced Dreyfus guilty, Boisdeffre ceased to count: clericalism, staff prejudices, prevented his forming a candid opinion, although there is no one in the world (or was, rather, before this Dreyfus business) half so clerical as our friend. Next he told us that now we were sure to get the truth, the case had been put in the hands of Saussier, and he, a soldier of the Republic (our friend coming of an ultra-monarchist family, if you please), was a man of bronze, a stern unyielding conscience. But when Saussier pronounced Esterhazy innocent, he found fresh reasons to account for the decision, reasons damaging not to Dreyfus but to General Saussier. It was the militarist spirit that blinded Saussier (and I must explain to you that our friend is just as much militarist as clerical, or at least he was; I don't know what to think of him now). His family are all broken-hearted at seeing him possessed by such ideas."

"Don't you think," I suggested, turning half towards Saint-Loup so as not to appear to be cutting myself off from him, as well as towards his friend, and so that we might all three join in the conversation, "that the influence we ascribe to environment is particularly true of intellectual environment. One is the man of one's idea. There are far fewer ideas than men, therefore all men with similar ideas are alike. As there is nothing material in an idea, so the people who are only materially neighbours of the man with an idea can do nothing to alter it."

At this point I was interrupted by Saint-Loup, because another of the young men had leaned across to him with a smile and, pointing to me, exclaimed: "Duroc! Duroc all over!" I had no idea what this might mean, but I felt the expression on the shy young face to be more than friendly. While I was speaking, the approbation of the party seemed to Saint-Loup superfluous; he insisted on silence. And just as a conductor stops his orchestra with a rap from his baton because some one in the audience has made a noise, so he rebuked the author of this disturbance: "Gibergue, you must keep your mouth shut when people are speaking. You can tell us about it afterwards." And to me: "Please go on."

I gave a sigh of relief, for I had been afraid that he was going to make me begin all over again.

"And as an idea," I went on, "is a thing that cannot participate in human interests and would be incapable of deriving any benefit from them, the men who are governed by an idea are not influenced by material considerations."

When I had finished, "That's one in the eye for you, my boys," exclaimed Saint-Loup, who had been following me with his gaze with the same anxious solicitude as if I had been walking upon a tight-rope. "What were you going to say, Gibergue?"

"I was just saying that your friend reminded me of Major Duroc. I seemed to hear him speaking."

"Why, I've often thought so myself," replied Saint-Loup; "they have several points in common, but you'll find there are a thousand things in this fellow that Duroc hasn't got."

Saint-Loup was not satisfied with this comparison. In an ecstasy of joy, into which there no doubt entered the joy that he felt in making me shine before his friends, with extreme volubility, stroking me as though he were rubbing down a horse that had just come first past the post, he reiterated: "You're the cleverest man I know, do you hear?" He corrected himself, and added: "You and Elstir.—You don't mind my bracketing him with you, I hope. You understand—punctiliousness. It's like this: I say it to you as one might have said to Balzac: 'You are the greatest novelist of the century—you and Stendhal.' Excessive punctiliousness, don't you know, and at heart an immense admiration. No? You don't admit Stendhal?" he went on, with an ingenuous confidence in my judgment which found expression in a charming, smiling, almost childish glance of interrogation from his green eyes. "Oh, good! I see you're on my side; Bloch can't stand Stendhal. I think it's idiotic of him. The *Chartreuse* is after all an immense work, don't you think? I am so glad you agree with me. What is it you like best in the *Chartreuse*, answer me?" he appealed to me with a boyish impetuosity. And the menace of his physical strength made the question almost terrifying. "Mosca? Fabrice?" I answered timidly that Mosca reminded me a little of M. de Norpois. Whereupon peals of laughter from the young Siegfried Saint-Loup. And while I was going on to explain: "But Mosca is far more intelligent, not so pedantic," I heard Robert cry: "Bravo!" actually clapping his hands, and, helpless with laughter, gasp: "Oh, perfect! Admirable! You really are astounding."

I took a particular pleasure in talking to this young man, as for that matter to all Robert's friends and to Robert himself, about their barracks, the officers of the garrison, and the army in general. Thanks to the immensely enlarged scale on which we see the things, however petty they may be, in the midst of which we eat, and talk, and lead our real life; thanks to that formidable enlargement which they undergo, and the effect of which is that the rest of the world, not being present, cannot compete with them, and assumes in comparison the unsubstantiality of a dream, I had begun to take an interest in the various personalities of the barracks, in the officers whom I saw in the square when I went to visit Saint-Loup, or, if I was awake then, when the regiment passed beneath my windows. I should have liked to know more about the major whom Saint-Loup so greatly admired, and about the course of military history which would have appealed to me "even from an aesthetic point of view." I knew that with Robert the spoken word was, only too often, a trifle hollow, but at other times implied the assimilation of valuable ideas which he was fully capable of grasping. Unfortunately, from the military point of view Robert was exclusively preoccupied at this time with the case of Dreyfus. He spoke little about it, since he alone of the party at table was a Dreyfusard; the others were violently opposed to the idea of a fresh trial, except my other neighbour, my new friend, and his opinions appeared to be somewhat vague. A firm admirer of the colonel, who was regarded as an exceptionally competent officer and had denounced the current agitation against the Army in several of his regimental orders, which won him the reputation of being an anti-Dreyfusard, my neighbour had heard that his commanding officer had let fall certain remarks which had led to the supposition that he had his doubts as to the guilt of Dreyfus and retained his admiration for Picquart. In the latter respect, at any rate, the rumour of Dreyfusism as applied to the colonel was as ill-founded as are all the rumours, springing from none knows where, which float around any great scandal. For, shortly afterwards, this colonel having been detailed to interrogate the former Chief of the Intelligence Branch, had treated him with a brutality and contempt the like of which had never been known before. However this might be (and naturally he had not taken the liberty of going direct to the colonel for his information), my neighbour had paid

Saint-Loup the compliment of telling him—in the tone in which a Catholic lady might tell a Jewish lady that her parish priest denounced the pogroms in Russia and might openly admire the generosity of certain Israelites—that their colonel was not, with regard to Dreyfusism—to a certain kind of Dreyfusism, at least—the fanatical, narrow opponent that he had been made out to be.

"I am not surprised," was Saint-Loup's comment; "for he's a sensible man. But in spite of that he is blinded by the prejudices of his caste, and above all by his clericalism. Now," he turned to me, "Major Duroc, the lecturer on military history I was telling you about; there's a man who is whole-heartedly in support of our views, or so I'm told. And I should have been surprised to hear that he wasn't, for he's not only a brilliantly clever man, but a Radical-Socialist and a freemason."

Partly out of courtesy to his friends, whom these expressions of Saint-Loup's faith in Dreyfus made uncomfortable, and also because the subject was of more interest to myself, I asked my neighbour if it were true that this major gave a demonstration of military history which had a genuine aesthetic beauty. "It is absolutely true."

"But what do you mean by that?"

"Well, all that you read, let us say, in the narrative of a military historian, the smallest facts, the most trivial happenings, are only the outward signs of an idea which has to be analysed, and which often brings to light other ideas, like a palimpsest. So that you have a field for study as intellectual as any science you care to name, or any art, and one that is satisfying to the mind."

"Give me an example or two, if you don't mind."

"It is not very easy to explain," Saint-Loup broke in. "You read, let us say, that this or that Corps has tried . . . but before we go any further, the serial number of the Corps, its order of battle are not without their significance. If it is not the first time that the operation has been attempted, and if for the same operation we find a different Corps being brought up, it is perhaps a sign that the previous Corps have been wiped out or have suffered heavy casualties in the said operation; that they are no longer in a fit state to carry it through successfully. Next, we must ask ourselves what was this Corps which is now out of action; if it was composed of shock troops, held in reserve for big attacks, a fresh Corps of inferior quality will have little chance of succeeding where the first has failed. Furthermore, if we are not at the start of a campaign, this fresh Corps may itself be a composite formation of odds and ends withdrawn from other Corps, which throws a light on the strength of the forces the belligerent still has at his disposal and the proximity of the moment when his forces shall be definitely inferior to the enemy's, which gives to the operation on which this Corps is about to engage a different meaning, because, if it is no longer in a condition to make good its losses, its successes even will only help mathematically to bring it nearer to its ultimate destruction. And then, the serial number of the Corps that it has facing it is of no less significance. If, for instance, it is a much weaker unit, which has already accounted for several important units of the attacking force, the whole nature of the operation is changed, since, even if it should end in the loss of the position which the defending force has been holding, simply to have held it for any length of time may be a great success if a very small defending force has been sufficient to disable highly important forces on the other side. You can understand that if, in the analysis of the Corps engaged on both sides, there are all these points of importance, the study of the position itself, of the roads, of the railways which it commands, of the lines of communication which it protects, is of the very highest. One must study what I may call the whole geographical context," he added with a laugh. And indeed he was so delighted with this expression that, every time he employed it, even months afterwards, it was always accompanied by the same laugh. "While the operation is being prepared by one of the belligerents, if you read that one of his patrols has been wiped out in the neighbourhood of the position by the other belligerent, one of the conclusions which you are entitled to draw is that one side was attempting to reconnoitre the defensive works with which the other intended to resist his attack. An exceptional burst of activity at a given point may indicate the desire to capture that point, but equally well the desire to hold the enemy in check there, not to retaliate at the point at which he has attacked you; or it may indeed be only a feint, intended to cover by an increased activity the relief of troops in that sector. (Which was a classic feint in Napoleon's wars.) On the other hand, to appreciate the significance of any movement, its probable object, and, as a corollary, the other movements by which it will be accompanied or followed, it is not immaterial to consult, not so much the announcements issued by the Higher Command, which may be intended to deceive the enemy, to mask a possible check, as the manual of field operations in use in the country in question. We are always entitled to assume that the manœuvre which an army has attempted to carry out is that prescribed by the rules that are applicable to the circumstances. If, for instance, the rule lays down that a frontal attack should be accompanied by a flank attack; if, after the flank attack has failed, the Higher Command makes out that it had no connexion with the main attack and was merely a diversion, there is a strong likelihood that the truth will be found by consulting the rules and not the reports issued from Headquarters. And there are not only the regulations governing each army to be considered, but their traditions, their habits, their doctrines; the study of diplomatic activities, with their perpetual action or reaction upon military activities, must not be neglected either. Incidents apparently insignificant, which at the time are not understood, will explain to you how the enemy, counting upon a support which these incidents shew to have been withheld, was able to carry out only a part of his strategic plan. So that, if you can read between the lines of military history, what is a confused jumble for the ordinary reader becomes a chain of reasoning as straightforward as a picture is for the picture-lover who can see what the person portrayed is wearing and has in his hands, while the visitor hurrying through the gallery is bewildered by a blur of colour which gives him a headache. But just as with certain pictures, in which it is not enough to observe that the figure is holding a chalice, but one must know why the painter chose to place a chalice in his hands, what it is intended to symbolise, so these military operations, apart from their immediate object, are quite regularly traced, in the mind of the general responsible for the campaign, from the plans of earlier battles, which we may call the past experience, the literature, the learning, the etymology, the aristocracy (whichever you like) of the battles of to-day. Observe that I am not speaking for the moment of the local, the (what shall I call it?) spatial identity of battles. That exists also. A battle-field has never been, and never will be throughout the centuries, simply the ground upon which a particular battle has been fought. If it has been a battle-field, that was because it combined certain conditions of geographical position, of geological formation, drawbacks even, of a kind that would obstruct the enemy (a river, for instance, cutting his force in two), which made it a good field of battle. And so what it has been it will continue to be. A painter doesn't make a studio out of any old room; so you don't make a battle-field out of any old piece of ground. There are places set apart for the purpose. But, once again, this is not what I was telling you about; it was the type of battle which one follows, in a sort of strategic tracing, a tactical imitation, if you like. Battles like Ulm, Lodi, Leipzig, Cannae. I can't say whether there is ever going to be another war, or what nations are going to fight in it, but, if a war does come, you may be sure that it will include (and deliberately, on the commander's part) a Cannae, an Austerlitz, a Rosbach, a Waterloo. Some of our people say quite openly that Marshal von Schieffer and General Falkenhausen have prepared a Battle of Cannae against France, in the Hannibal style, pinning their enemy down along his whole front, and advancing on both flanks, especially through Belgium, while Bernhardi prefers the oblique order of Frederick the Great, Lenthen rather than Cannae. Others expound their views less crudely, but I can tell you one thing, my boy, that Beauconseil, the squadron commander I introduced you to the other day, who is an officer with a very great future before him, has swotted up a little Pratzen attack of his own; he knows it inside out, he is keeping it up his sleeve, and if he ever has an opportunity to put it into practice he will make a clean job of it and let us have it on a big scale. The break through in the centre at Rivoli, too; that's a thing that will crop up if there's ever another war. It's no more obsolete than the *Iliad*. I must add that we are practically condemned to make frontal attacks, because we can't afford to repeat the mistake we made in Seventy; we must assume the offensive, and nothing else. The only thing that troubles me is that if I see only the slower, more antiquated minds among us opposing this splendid doctrine, still, one of the youngest of my masters, who is a genius, I mean Mangin, would like us to leave room, provisionally of course, for the defensive. It is not very easy to answer him when he cites the example of Austerlitz, where the defence was merely a prelude to attack and victory."

The enunciation of these theories by Saint-Loup made me happy. They gave me to hope that perhaps I was not being led astray, in my life at Doncières, with regard to these officers whom I used to hear being discussed while I sat sipping a sauterne which bathed them in its charming golden glint, by the same magnifying power which had swollen to such enormous proportions in my eyes while I was at Balbec the King and Queen of the South Sea Island, the little group of the four epicures, the young gambler, Legrandin's brother-in-law, now shrunken so in my view as to appear non-existent. What gave me pleasure to-day would not, perhaps, leave me indifferent to-morrow, as had always happened hitherto; the creature that I still was at this moment was not, perhaps, doomed to immediate destruction, since to the ardent and fugitive passion which I had felt on these few evenings for everything connected with military life, Saint-Loup, by what he had just been saying to me, touching the art of war, added an intellectual foundation, of a permanent character, capable of attaching me to itself so strongly that I might, without any attempt to deceive myself, feel assured that after I had left Doncières I should continue to take an interest in the work of my friends there, and should not be long in coming to pay them another visit. At the same time, so as to make quite sure that this art of war was indeed an art in the true sense of the word:

"You interest me—I beg your pardon, *tu* interest me enormously," I said to Saint-Loup, "but tell me, there is one point that puzzles me. I feel that I could be keenly thrilled by the art of strategy, but if so I must first be sure that it is not so very different from the other arts, that knowing the rules is not everything. You tell me that plans of battles are copied. I do find something aesthetic, just as you said, in seeing beneath a modern battle the plan of an older one, I can't tell you how attractive it sounds. But then, does the genius of the commander count for nothing? Does he really do no more than apply the rules? Or, in point of science, are there great generals as there are great surgeons, who, when the symptoms exhibited by two states of ill-health are identical to the outward eye, nevertheless feel, for some infinitesimal reason, founded perhaps on their experience, but interpreted afresh, that in one case they ought to do one thing, in another case another; that in one case it is better to operate, in another to wait?"

"I should just say so! You will find Napoleon not attacking when all the rules ordered him to attack, but some obscure divination warned him not to. For instance, look at Austerlitz, or in 1806 take his instructions to Lannes. But you will find certain generals slavishly imitating one of Napoleon's movements and arriving at a diametrically opposite result. There are a dozen examples of that in 1870. But even for the interpretation of what the enemy *may* do, what he actually does is only a symptom which may mean any number of different things. Each of them has an equal chance of being the right thing, if one looks only to reasoning and science, just as in certain difficult cases all the medical science in the world will be powerless to decide whether the invisible tumour is malignant or not, whether or not the operation ought to be performed. It is his instinct, his divination—like Mme. de Thèbes (you follow me?)—which decides, in the great general as in the great doctor. Thus I've been telling you, to take one instance, what might be meant by a reconnaissance on the eve of a battle. But it may mean a dozen other things also, such as to make the enemy think you are going to attack him at one point whereas you intend to attack him at another, to put out a screen which will prevent him from seeing the preparations for your real operation, to force him to bring up fresh troops, to hold them, to immobilise them in a different place from where they are needed, to form an estimate of the forces at his disposal, to feel him, to force him to shew his hand. Sometimes, indeed, the fact that you employ an immense number of troops in an operation is by no means a proof that that is your true objective; for you may be justified in carrying it out, even if it is only a feint, so that your feint may have a better chance of deceiving the enemy. If I had time now to go through the Napoleonic wars from this point of view, I assure you that these simple classic movements which we study here, and which you will come and see us practising in the field, just for the pleasure of a walk, you young rascal—no, I know you're not well, I apologise!—well, in a war, when you feel behind you the vigilance, the judgment, the profound study of the Higher Command, you are as much moved by them as by the simple lamps of a lighthouse, only a material combustion, but an emanation of the spirit, sweeping through space to warn ships of danger. I may have been wrong, perhaps, in speaking to you only of the literature of war. In reality, as the formation of the soil, the direction of wind and light tell us which way a tree will grow, so the conditions in which a campaign is fought, the features of the country through which you march, prescribe, to a certain extent, and limit the number of the plans among which the general has to choose. Which means that along a mountain range, through a system of valleys, over certain plains, it is almost with the inevitability and the tremendous beauty of an avalanche that you can forecast the line of an army on the march."

"Now you deny me that freedom of choice in the commander, that power of divination in the enemy who is trying to discover his plan, which you allowed me a moment ago."

"Not at all. You remember that book of philosophy we read together at Balbec, the richness of the world of possibilities compared with the real world. Very well. It is the same again with the art of strategy. In a given situation there will be four plans that offer themselves, one of which the general has to choose, as a disease may pass through various phases for which the doctor has to watch. And here again the weakness and greatness of the human elements are fresh causes of uncertainty. For of these four plans let us assume that contingent reasons (such as the attainment of minor objects, or time, which may be pressing, or the smallness of his effective strength and shortage of rations) lead the general to prefer the first, which is less perfect, but less costly also to carry out, is more rapid, and has for its terrain a richer country for feeding his troops. He may, after having begun with this plan, which the enemy, uncertain at first, will soon detect, find that success lies beyond his grasp, the difficulties being too great (that is what I call the element of human weakness), abandon it and try the second or third or fourth. But it may equally be that he has tried the first plan (and this is what I call human greatness) merely as a feint to pin down the enemy, so as to surprise him later at a point where he has not been expecting an attack. Thus at Ulm, Mack, who expected the enemy to advance from the west, was surrounded from the north where he thought he was perfectly safe. My example is not a very good one, as a matter of fact. And Ulm is a better type of enveloping battle, which the future will see reproduced, because it is not only a classic example from which generals will seek inspiration, but a form that is to some extent necessary (one of several necessities, which leaves room for choice, for variety) like a type of crystallisation. But it doesn't much matter, really, because these conditions are after all artificial. To go back to our philosophy book; it is like the rules of logic or scientific laws, reality does conform to it more or less, but bear in mind that the great mathematician Poincaré is by no means certain that mathematics are strictly accurate. As to the rules themselves, which I mentioned to you, they are of secondary importance really, and besides they are altered from time to time. We cavalrymen, for instance, have to go by the *Field Service* of 1895, which, you may say, is out of date since it is based on the old and obsolete doctrine which maintains that cavalry warfare has little more than a moral effect, in the panic that the charge creates in the enemy. Whereas the more intelligent of our teachers, all the best brains in the cavalry, and particularly the major I was telling you about, anticipate on the contrary that the decisive victory will be obtained by a real hand-to-hand encounter in which our weapons will be sabre and lance and the side that can hold out longer will win, not simply morally and by creating panic, but materially."

"Saint-Loup is quite right, and it is probable that the next *Field Service* will shew signs of this evolution," put in my other neighbour.

"I am not ungrateful for your support, for your opinions seem to make more impression upon my friend than mine," said Saint-Loup with a smile, whether because the growing attraction between his comrade and myself annoyed him slightly or because he thought it graceful to solemnise it with this official confirmation. "Perhaps I may have underestimated the importance of the rules; I don't know. They do change, that must be admitted. But in the meantime they control the military situation, the plans of campaign and concentration. If they reflect a false conception of strategy they may be the principal cause of defeat. All this is a little too technical for you," he remarked to me. "After all, you may say that what does most to accelerate the evolution of the art of war is wars themselves. In the course of a campaign, if it is at all long, you will see one belligerent profiting by the lessons furnished him by the successes and mistakes, perfecting the methods of the other, who will improve on him in turn. But all that is a thing of the past. With the terrible advance of artillery, the wars of the future, if there are to be any more wars, will be so short that, before we have had time to think of putting our lessons into practice, peace will have been signed."

"Don't be so touchy," I told Saint-Loup, reverting to the first words of this speech. "I was listening to you quite eagerly."

"If you will kindly not fly into a passion, and will allow me to speak," his friend went on, "I shall add to what you have just been saying that if battles copy and coincide with one another it is not merely due to the mind of the commander. It may happen that a mistake on his part (for instance, his failure to appreciate the strength of the enemy) will lead him to call upon his men for extravagant sacrifices, sacrifices which certain units will make with an abnegation so sublime that their part in the battle will be analogous to that played by some other unit in some other battle, and these will be quoted in history as interchangeable examples: to stick to 1870, we have the Prussian Guard at Saint-Privat, and the Turcos at Frœschviller and Wissembourg."

"Ah! Interchangeable; very neat! Excellent! The lad has brains," was Saint-Loup's comment.

I was not unmoved by these last examples, as always when, beneath the particular instance, I was afforded a glimpse of the general law. Still, the genius of the commander, that was what interested me, I was anxious to discover in what it consisted, what steps, in given circumstances, when the commander who lacked genius could not withstand the enemy, the inspired leader would take to re-establish his jeopardised position, which, according to Saint-Loup, was quite possible and had been done by Napoleon more than once. And to understand what military worth meant I asked for comparisons between the various generals whom I knew by name, which of them had most markedly the character of a leader, the gifts of a tactician; at the risk of boring my new friends, who however shewed no signs of boredom, but continued to answer me with an inexhaustible good nature.

I felt myself isolated, not only from the great, freezing night which extended far around us and in which we heard from time to time the whistle of a train which only rendered more keen the pleasure of being where we were, or the chime of an hour which, happily, was still a long way short of that at which these young men would have to buckle on their sabres and go, but also from all my external obsessions, almost from the memory of Mme. de Guermantes, by the hospitality of Saint-Loup, to which that of his friends, reinforcing it, gave, so to speak, a greater solidity; by the warmth also of this little dining-room, by the savour of the well-chosen dishes that were set before us. They gave as much pleasure to my imagination as to my appetite; sometimes the little piece of still life from which they had been taken, the rugged holy water stoup of the oyster in which lingered a few drops of brackish water, or the knotted stem, the yellow leaves of a bunch of grapes still enveloped them, inedible, poetic and remote as a landscape, and producing, at different points in the course of the meal, the impressions of rest in the shade of a vine and of an excursion out to sea; on other evenings it was the cook alone who threw into relief these original properties of our food, which he presented in its natural setting, like a work of art; and a fish cooked in wine was brought in on a long earthenware dish, on which, as it stood out in relief on a bed of bluish herbs, unbreakable now but still contorted from having been dropped alive into boiling water, surrounded by a circle of satellite creatures in their shells, crabs, shrimps and mussels, it had the appearance of being part of a ceramic design by Bernard Palissy.

"I am jealous, furious," Saint-Loup attacked me, half smiling, half in earnest, alluding to the interminable conversations aside which I had been having with his friend. "Is it because you find him more intelligent than me; do you like him better than me? Well, I suppose he's everything now, and no one else is to have a look in!" Men who are enormously in love with a woman, who live in the society of woman-lovers, allow themselves pleasantries on which others, who would see less innocence in them, would never venture.

When the conversation became general, they avoided any reference to Dreyfus for fear of offending Saint-Loup. The following week, however, two of his friends were remarking what a curious thing it was that, living in so military an atmosphere, he was so keen a Dreyfusard, almost an antimilitarist. "The reason is," I suggested, not wishing to enter into details, "that the influence of environment is not so important as people think . . ." I intended of course to stop at this point, and not to reiterate the observations which I had made to Saint-Loup a few days earlier. Since, however, I had repeated these words almost textually, I proceeded to excuse myself by adding: "As, in fact, I was saying the other day . . ." But I had reckoned without the reverse side of Robert's polite admiration of myself and certain other persons. That admiration reached its fulfilment in so entire an assimilation of their ideas that, in the course of a day or two, he would have completely forgotten that those ideas were not his own. And so, in the matter of my modest theory, Saint-Loup, for all the world as though it had always dwelt in his own brain, and as though I were merely poaching on his preserves, felt it incumbent upon him to greet my discovery with warm approval.

"Why, yes; environment is of no importance."

And with as much vehemence as if he were afraid of my interrupting, or failing to understand him:

"The real influence is that of one's intellectual environment! One is the man of one's idea!"

He stopped for a moment, with the satisfied smile of one who has digested his dinner, dropped his eyeglass and, fixing me with a gimlet-like stare:

"All men with similar ideas are alike," he informed me, with a challenging air. Probably he had completely forgotten that I myself had said to him, only a few days earlier, what on the other hand he remembered so well.

I did not arrive at Saint-Loup's restaurant every evening in the same state of mind. If a memory, a sorrow that weigh on us are able to leave us so effectively that we are no longer aware of them, they can also return and sometimes remain with us for a long time. There were evenings when, as I passed through the town on my way to the restaurant, I felt so keen a longing for Mme. de Guermantes that I could scarcely breathe; you might have said that part of my breast had been cut open by a skilled anatomist, taken out, and replaced by an equal part of immaterial suffering, by an equivalent load of longing and love. And however neatly the wound may have been stitched together, there is not much comfort in life when regret for the loss of another person is substituted for one's entrails, it seems to be occupying more room than they, one feels it perpetually, and besides, what a contradiction in terms to be obliged to *think* a part of one's body. Only it seems that we are worth more, somehow. At the whisper of a breeze we sigh, from oppression, but from weariness also. I would look up at the sky. If it were clear, I would say to myself: "Perhaps she is in the country; she is looking at the same stars; and, for all I know, when I arrive at the restaurant Robert may say to me: 'Good news! I have just heard from my aunt; she wants to meet you; she is coming down here.' " It was not in the firmament alone that I enshrined the thought of Mme. de Guermantes. A passing breath of air, more fragrant than the rest, seemed to bring me a message from her, as, long ago, from Gilberte in the cornfields of Méséglise. We do not change; we introduce into the feeling with which we regard a person many slumbering elements which that feeling revives but which are foreign to it. Besides, with these feelings for particular people, there is always something in us that is trying to bring them nearer to the truth, that is to say, to absorb them in a more general feeling, common to the whole of humanity, with which people and the suffering that they cause us are merely a means to enable us to communicate. What brought a certain pleasure into my grief was that I knew it to be a tiny fragment of the universal love. Simply because I thought that I recognised sorrows which I had felt on Gilberte's account, or else when in the evenings at Combray Mamma would not stay in any room, and also the memory of certain pages of Bergotte, in the agony I now felt, to which Mme. de Guermantes, her coldness, her absence, were not clearly linked, as cause is to effect in the mind of a philosopher, I did not conclude that Mme. de Guermantes was not the cause of that agony. Is there not such a thing as a diffused bodily pain, extending, radiating out into other parts, which, however, it leaves, to vanish altogether, if the practitioner lays his finger on the precise spot from which it springs? And yet, until that moment, its extension gave it for us so vague, so fatal a semblance that, powerless to explain or even to locate it, we imagined that there was no possibility of its being healed. As I made my way to the restaurant I said to myself: "A fortnight already since I last saw Mme. de Guermantes." A fortnight which did not appear so enormous an interval save to me, who, when Mme. de Guermantes was concerned, reckoned time by minutes. For me it was no longer the stars and the breeze merely, but the arithmetical divisions of time that assumed a dolorous and poetic aspect. Each day now was like the loose crest of a crumbling mountain, down one side of which I felt that I could descend into oblivion, but down the other was borne by the necessity of seeing the Duchess again. And I was continually inclining one way or the other, having no stable equilibrium. One day I said to myself: "Perhaps there will be a letter to-night;" and on entering the dining-room I found courage to ask Saint-Loup:

"You don't happen to have had any news from Paris?"

"Yes," he replied gloomily; "bad news."

I breathed a sigh of relief when I realised that it was only he who was unhappy, and that the news came from his mistress. But I soon saw that one of its consequences would be to prevent Robert, for ever so long, from taking me to see his aunt.

I learned that a quarrel had broken out between him and his mistress, through the post presumably, unless she had come down to pay him a flying visit between trains. And the quarrels, even when relatively slight, which they had previously had, had always seemed as though they must prove insoluble. For she was a girl of violent temper, who would stamp her foot and burst into tears for reasons as incomprehensible as those that make children shut themselves into dark cupboards, not come out for dinner, refuse to give any explanation, and only redouble their sobs when, our patience exhausted, we visit them with a whipping. To say that Saint-Loup suffered terribly from this estrangement would be an understatement of the truth, which would give the reader a false impression of his grief. When he found himself alone, the only picture in his mind being that of his mistress parting from him with the respect which she had felt for him at the sight of his energy, the anxieties which he had had at first gave way before the irreparable, and the cessation of an anxiety is so pleasant a thing that the rupture, once it was certain, assumed for him something of the same kind of charm as a reconciliation. What he began to suffer from, a little later, was a secondary and accidental grief, the tide of which flowed incessantly from his own heart, at the idea that perhaps she would be glad to make it up, that it was not inconceivable that she was waiting for a word from him, that in the mean time, to be avenged on him, she would perhaps on a certain evening, in a certain place, do a certain thing, and that he had only to telegraph to her that he was coming for it not to happen, that others perhaps were taking advantage of the time which he was letting slip, and that in a few days it would be too late to recapture her, for she would be already bespoke. Among all these possibilities he was certain of nothing; his mistress preserved a silence which wrought him up to such a frenzy of grief that he began to ask himself whether she might not be in hiding at Doncières, or have sailed for the Indies.

It has been said that silence is a force; in another and widely different sense it is a tremendous force in the hands of those who are loved. It increases the anxiety of the lover who has to wait. Nothing so tempts us to approach another person as what is keeping us apart; and what barrier is there so insurmountable as silence? It has been said also that silence is a torture, capable of goading to madness him who is condemned to it in a prison cell. But what a torture—keener than that of having to keep silence—to have to endure the silence of the person one loves! Robert asked himself: "What can she be doing, never to send me a single word, like this? She hates me, perhaps, and will always go on hating me." And he reproached himself. Thus her silence did indeed drive him mad with jealousy and remorse. Besides, more cruel than the silence of prisons, that kind of silence is in itself a prison. An immaterial enclosure, I admit, but impenetrable, this interposed slice of empty atmosphere through which, despite its emptiness, the visual rays of the abandoned lover cannot pass. Is there a more terrible illumination than that of silence which shews us not one absent love but a thousand, and shews us each of them in the act of indulging in some fresh betrayal? Sometimes, in an abrupt relaxation of his strain, Robert would imagine that this period of silence was just coming to an end, that the long expected letter was on its way. He saw it, it arrived, he started at every sound, his thirst was already quenched, he murmured: "The letter! The letter!" After this glimpse of a phantom oasis of affection, he found himself once more toiling across the real desert of a silence without end.

He suffered in anticipation, without a single omission, all the griefs and pains of a rupture which at other moments he fancied he might somehow contrive to avoid, like people who put all their affairs in order with a view to a migration abroad which they never make, whose minds, no longer certain where they will find themselves living next day, flutter helplessly for the time being, detached from them, like a heart that is taken out of a dying man and continues to beat, though disjoined from the rest of his body. Anyhow, this hope that his mistress would return gave him courage to persevere in the rupture, as the belief that one will return alive from the battle helps one to face death. And inasmuch as habit is, of all the plants of human growth, the one that has least need of nutritious soil in order to live, and is the first to appear upon what is apparently the most barren rock, perhaps had he begun by effecting their rupture as a feint he would in the end have grown genuinely accustomed to it. But his uncertainty kept him in a state of emotion which, linked with the memory of the woman herself, was akin to love. He forced himself, nevertheless, not to write to her, thinking perhaps that it was a less cruel torment to live without his mistress than with her in certain conditions, or else that, after the way in which they had parted, it was necessary to wait for excuses from her, if she was to keep what he believed her to feel for him in the way, if not of love, at any rate of esteem and regard. He contented himself with going to the telephone, which had recently been installed at Doncières, and asking for news from, or giving instructions to a lady's maid whom he had procured and placed with his friend. These communications were, as it turned out, complicated and took up much of his time, since, influenced by what her literary friends preached to her about the ugliness of the capital, but principally for the sake of her animals, her dogs, her monkey, her canaries and her parrokeet, whose incessant din her Paris landlord had declined to tolerate for another moment, Robert's mistress had now taken a little house in the neighbourhood of Versailles. Meanwhile he, down at Doncières, no longer slept a wink all night. Once, in my room, overcome by exhaustion, he dozed off for a little. But suddenly he began to talk, tried to get up and run, to stop something from happening, said: "I hear her; you shan't . . . you shan't. . . ." He awoke. He had been dreaming, he explained to me, that he was in the country with the serjeant-major. His host had tried to keep him away from a certain part of the house. Saint-Loup had discovered that the serjeant-major had staying with him a subaltern, extremely rich and extremely vicious, whom he knew to have a violent passion for his mistress. And suddenly in his dream he had distinctly heard the spasmodic, regular cries which his mistress was in the habit of uttering at the moment of gratification. He had tried to force the serjeant-major to take him to the room in which she was. And the other had held him back, to keep him from going there, with an air of annoyance at such a want of discretion in a guest which, Robert said, he would never be able to forget.

"It was an idiotic dream," he concluded, still quite breathless.

All the same I could see that, during the hour that followed, he was more than once on the point of telephoning to his mistress to beg for a reconciliation. My father had now had the telephone for some time at home, but I doubt whether that would have been of much use to Saint-Loup. Besides, it hardly seemed to me quite proper to make my parents, or even a mechanical instrument installed in their house, play pander between Saint-Loup and his mistress, ladylike and high-minded as the latter might be. His bad dream began to fade from his memory. With a fixed and absent stare, he came to see me on each of those cruel days which traced in my mind as they followed one after the other the splendid sweep of a staircase forged in hard metal on which Robert stood asking himself what decision his friend was going to take.

At length she wrote to ask whether he would consent to forgive her. As soon as he realised that a definite rupture had been avoided he saw all the disadvantages of a reconciliation. Besides, he had already begun to suffer less acutely, and had almost accepted a grief the sharp tooth of which he would have, in a few months perhaps, to feel again if their intimacy were to be resumed. He did not hesitate for long. And perhaps he hesitated only because he was now certain of being able to recapture his mistress, of being able to do it and therefore of doing it. Only she asked him, so that she might have time to recover her equanimity, not to come to Paris at the New Year. Now he had not the heart to go to Paris without seeing her. On the other hand, she had declared her willingness to go abroad with him, but for that he would need to make a formal application for leave, which Captain de Borodino was unwilling to grant.

"I'm sorry about it, because of your meeting with my aunt, which will have to be put off. I dare say I shall be in Paris at Easter."

"We shan't be able to call on Mme. de Guermantes then, because I shall have gone to Balbec. But, really, it doesn't matter in the least, I assure you."

"To Balbec? But you didn't go there till August."

"I know; but next year they're making me go there earlier, for my health."

All that he feared was that I might form a bad impression of his mistress, after what he had told me. "She is violent simply because she is too frank, too thorough in her feelings. But she is a sublime creature. You can't imagine what exquisite poetry there is in her. She goes every year to spend all Souls' Day at Bruges. 'Nice' of her, don't you think? If you ever do meet her you'll see what I mean; she has a greatness. . . ." And, as he was infected with certain of the mannerisms used in the literary circles in which the lady moved: "There is something sidereal about her, in fact something bardic; you know what I mean, the poet merging into the priest."

I was searching all through dinner for a pretext which would enable Saint-Loup to ask his aunt to see me without my having to wait until he came to Paris. Now such a pretext was furnished by the desire that I had to see some more pictures by Elstir, the famous painter whom Saint-Loup and I had met at Balbec. A pretext behind which there was, moreover, an element of truth, for if, on my visits to Elstir, what I had asked of his painting had been that it should lead me to the comprehension and love of things better than itself, a real thaw, an authentic square in a country town, live women on a beach (all the more would I have commissioned from it the portraits of the realities which I had not been able to fathom, such as a lane of hawthorn-blossoms, not so much that it might perpetuate their beauty for me as that it might reveal that beauty to me), now, on the other hand, it was the originality, the seductive attraction of those paintings that aroused my desire, and what I wanted above anything else was to look at other pictures by Elstir.

It seemed to me, also, that the least of his pictures were something quite different from the masterpieces even of greater painters than himself. His work was like a realm apart, whose frontiers were not to be passed, matchless in substance. Eagerly collecting the infrequent periodicals in which articles on him and his work had appeared, I had learned that it was only recently that he had begun to paint landscapes and still life, and that he had started with mythological subjects (I had seen photographs of two of these in his studio), and had then been for long under the influence of Japanese art.

Several of the works most characteristic of his various manners were scattered about the provinces. A certain house at les Andelys, in which there was one of his finest landscapes, seemed to me as precious, gave me as keen a desire to go there and see it as did a village in the Chartres district, among whose millstone walls was enshrined a glorious painted window; and towards the possessor of this treasure, towards the man who, inside his ugly house, on the main street, closeted like an astrologer, sat questioning one of those mirrors of the world which Elstir's pictures were, and who had perhaps bought it for many thousands of francs, I felt myself borne by that instinctive sympathy which joins the very hearts, the inmost natures of those who think alike upon a vital subject. Now three important works by my favourite painter were described in one of these articles as belonging to Mme. de Guermantes. So that it was, after all, quite sincerely that, on the evening on which Saint-Loup told me of his lady's projected visit to Bruges, I was able, during dinner, in front of his friends, to let fall, as though on the spur of the moment:

"Listen, if you don't mind. Just one last word on the subject of the lady we were speaking about. You remember Elstir, the painter I met at Balbec?"

"Why, of course I do."

"You remember how much I admired his work?"

"I do, quite well; and the letter we sent him."

"Very well, one of the reasons—not one of the chief reasons, a subordinate reason—why I should like to meet the said lady—you do know who' I mean, don't you?"

"Of course I do. How involved you're getting."

"Is that she has in her house one very fine picture, at least, by Elstir."

"I say, I never knew that."

"Elstir will probably be at Balbec at Easter; you know he stays down there now all the year round, practically. I should very much like to have seen this picture before I leave Paris. I don't know whether you're on sufficiently intimate terms with your aunt: but couldn't you manage, somehow, to give her so good an impression of me that she won't refuse, and then ask her if she'll let me come and see the picture without you, since you won't be there?"

"That's all right. I'll answer for her; I'll make a special point of it."

"Oh, Robert, you are an angel; I do love you."

"It's very nice of you to love me, but it would be equally nice if you were to call me *tu,* as you promised, and as you began to do."

"I hope it's not your departure that you two are plotting together," one of Robert's friends said to me. "You know, if Saint-Loup does go on leave, it needn't make any difference, we shall still be here. It will be less amusing for you, perhaps, but we'll do all we can to make you forget his absence." As a matter of fact, just as we had decided that Robert's mistress would have to go to Bruges by herself, the news came that Captain de Borodino, obdurate hitherto in his refusal, had given authority for Serjeant Saint-Loup to proceed on long leave to Bruges. What had happened was this. The Prince, extremely proud of his luxuriant head of hair, was an assiduous customer of the principal hairdresser in the town, who had started life as a boy under Napoleon III's barber. Captain de Borodino was on the best of terms with the hairdresser, being, in spite of his air of majesty, quite simple in his dealings with his inferiors. But the hairdresser, through whose books the Prince's account had been running without payment for at least five years, swollen no less by bottles of Portugal and Eau des Souverains, irons, razors, and strops, than by the ordinary charges for shampooing, haircutting and the like, had a greater respect for Saint-Loup, who always paid on the nail and kept several carriages and saddle-horses. Having learned of Saint-Loup's vexation at not being able to go with his mistress, he had spoken strongly about it to the Prince at a moment when he was trussed up in a white surplice with his head held firmly over the back of the chair and his throat menaced by a razor. This narrative of a young man's gallant adventures won from the princely captain a smile of Bonapartish indulgence. It is hardly probable that he thought of his unpaid bill, but the barber's recommendation tended to put him in as good a humour as one from a duke would have put him in a bad. While his chin was still smothered in soap, the leave was promised, and the warrant was signed that evening. As for the hairdresser, who was in the habit of boasting all day long of his own exploits, and in order to do so claimed for himself, shewing an astonishing faculty for lying, distinctions that were pure fabrications, having for once rendered this signal service to Saint-Loup, not only did he refrain from publishing it broadcast, but, as if vanity were obliged to lie, and when there was no scope for lying gave place to modesty, he never mentioned the matter to Robert again.

All his friends assured me that, as long as I stayed at Doncières, or if I should come there again at any time, even although Robert were away, their horses, their quarters, their time would be at my disposal, and I felt that it was with the greatest cordiality that these young men put their comfort and youth and strength at the service of my weakness.

"Why on earth," they went on, after insisting that I should stay, "don't you come down here every year; you see how our quiet life appeals to you! Besides you're so keen about everything that goes on in the regiment; quite the old soldier."

For I continued my eager demands that they would classify the different officers whose names I knew according to the degree of admiration which they seemed to deserve, just as, in my schooldays, I used to make the other boys classify the actors of the Théâtre-Français. If, in the place of one of the generals whom I had always heard mentioned at the head of the list, such as Galliffet or Négrier, one of Saint-Loup's friends, with a contemptuous: "But Négrier is one of the feeblest of our general officers," put the new, intact, appetising name of Pau or Geslin de Bourgogne, I felt the same joyful surprise as long ago when the outworn name of Thiron or Febvre was sent flying by the sudden explosion of the unfamiliar name of Amaury. "Better even than Négrier? But in what respect; give me an example?" I should have liked there to exist profound differences even among the junior officers of the regiment, and I hoped in the reason for these differences to seize the essential quality of what constituted military superiority. The one whom I should have been most interested to hear discussed, because he was the one whom I had most often seen, was the Prince de Borodino. But neither Saint-Loup nor his friends, if they did justice to the fine officer who kept his squadron up to the supreme pitch of efficiency, liked the man. Without speaking of him, naturally, in the same tone as of certain other officers, rankers and freemasons, who did not associate much with the rest and had, in comparison, an uncouth, barrack-room manner, they seemed not to include M. de Borodino among the officers of noble birth, from whom, it must be admitted, he differed considerably in his attitude even towards Saint-Loup. The others, taking advantage of the fact that Robert was only an N.C.O., and that therefore his influential relatives might be grateful were he invited to the houses of superior officers on whom ordinarily they would have looked down, lost no opportunity of having him to dine when any bigwig was expected who might be of use to a young cavalry serjeant. Captain de Borodino alone confined himself to his official relations (which, for that matter, were always excellent) with Robert. The fact was that the Prince, whose grandfather had been made a Marshal and a Prince-Duke by the Emperor, with whose family he had subsequently allied himself by marriage, while his father had married a cousin of Napoleon III and had twice been a Minister after the Coup d'Etat, felt that in spite of all this he did not count for much with Saint-Loup and the Guermantes connexion, who in turn, since he did not look at things from the same point of view as they, counted for very little with him. He suspected that, for Saint-Loup, he himself was—he, a kinsman of the Hohenzollern—not a true noble but the grandson of a farmer, but at the same time he regarded Saint-Loup as the son of a man whose Countship had been confirmed by the Emperor—one of what were known in the Faubourg Saint-Germain as 'touched-up' Counts—and who had besought him first for a Prefecture, then for some other post a long way down the list of subordinates to His Highness the Prince de Borodino, Minister of State, who was styled on his letters 'Monseigneur' and was a nephew of the Sovereign.

Something more than a nephew, possibly. The first Princesse de Borodino was reputed to have bestowed her favours on Napoleon I, whom she followed to the Isle of Elba, and the second hers on Napoleon III. And if, in the Captain's placid countenance, one caught a trace of Napoleon I—if not in his natural features, at least in the studied majesty of the mask—the officer had, particularly in his melancholy and kindly gaze, in his drooping moustache, something that reminded one also of Napoleon III; and this in so striking a fashion that, having asked leave, after Sedan, to join the Emperor in captivity, and having been sent away by Bismarck, before whom he had been brought, the latter, happening to look up at the young man who was preparing to leave the room, was at once impressed by the likeness and, reconsidering his decision, recalled him and gave him the authorisation which he, in common with every one else, had just been refused.

If the Prince de Borodino was not prepared to make overtures to Saint-Loup nor to the other representatives of Faubourg Saint-Germain society that there were in the regiment (while he frequently invited two subalterns of plebeian origin who were pleasant companions) it was because, looking down upon them all from the height of his Imperial grandeur, he drew between these two classes of inferiors the distinction that one set consisted of inferiors who knew themselves to be such and with whom he was delighted to spend his time, being beneath his outward majesty of a simple, jovial humour, and the other of inferiors who thought themselves his superiors, a claim which he could not allow. And so, while all the other officers of the regiment made much of Saint-Loup, the Prince de Borodino, to whose care the young man had been recommended by Marshal X——, confined himself to being obliging with regard to the military duties which Saint-Loup always performed in the most exemplary fashion, but never had him to his house except on one special occasion when he found himself practically compelled to invite him, and when, as this occurred during my stay at Doncières, he asked him to bring me to dinner also. I had no difficulty that evening, as I watched Saint-Loup sitting at his Captain's table, in distinguishing, in their respective manners and refinements, the difference that existed between the two aristocracies: the old nobility and that of the Empire. The offspring of a caste the faults of which, even if he repudiated them with all the force of his intellect, had been absorbed into his blood, a caste which, having ceased to exert any real authority for at least a century, saw nothing more now in the protective affability which formed part of its regular course of education, than an exercise, like horsemanship or fencing, cultivated without any serious purpose, as a sport; on meeting representatives of that middle class on which the old nobility so far looked down as to believe that they were flattered by its intimacy and would be honoured by the informality of its tone, Saint-Loup would take the hand of no matter who might be introduced to him, though he had failed perhaps to catch the stranger's name, in a friendly grip, and as he talked to him (crossing and uncrossing his legs all the time, flinging himself back in his chair in an attitude of absolute unconstraint, one foot in the palm of his hand) call him 'my dear fellow.' Belonging on the other hand to a nobility whose titles still preserved their original meaning, provided that their holders still possessed the splendid emoluments given in reward for glorious services and bringing to mind the record of high offices in which one is in command of numberless men and must know how to deal with men, the Prince de Borodino—not perhaps very distinctly or with any clear personal sense of superiority, but at any rate in his body, which revealed it by its attitudes and behaviour generally—regarded his own rank as a prerogative that was still effective; those same commoners whom Saint-Loup would have slapped on the shoulder and taken by the arm he addressed with a majestic affability, in which a reserve instinct with grandeur tempered the smiling good-fellowship that came naturally to him, in a tone marked at once by a genuine kindliness and a stiffness deliberately assumed. This was due, no doubt, to his being not so far removed from the great Embassies, and the Court itself, at which his father had held the highest posts, whereas the manners of Saint-Loup, the elbow on the table, the foot in the hand, would not have been well received there; but principally it was due to the fact that he looked down less upon the middle classes because they were the inexhaustible source from which the first Emperor had chosen his marshals and his nobles and in which the second had found a Rouher and a Fould.

Son, doubtless, or grandson of an Emperor, who had nothing more important to do than to command a squadron, the preoccupations of his putative father and grandfather could not, for want of an object on which to fasten themselves, survive in any real sense in the mind of M. de Borodino. But as the spirit of an artist continues to model, for many years after he is dead, the statue which he carved, so they had taken shape in him, were materialised, incarnate in him, it was they that his face reflected. It was with, in his voice, the vivacity of the first Emperor that he worded a reprimand to a corporal, with the dreamy melancholy of the second that he puffed out the smoke of a cigarette. When he passed in plain clothes through the streets of Doncières, a certain sparkle in his eyes escaping from under the brim of the bowler hat sent radiating round this captain of cavalry a regal incognito; people trembled when he strode into the serjeant-major's office, followed by the adjutant and the quartermaster, as though by Berthier and Masséna. When he chose the cloth for his squadron's breeches, he fastened on the master-tailor a gaze capable of baffling Talleyrand and deceiving Alexander; and at times, in the middle of an inspection, he would stop, let his handsome blue eyes cloud with dreams, twist his moustache, with the air of one building up a new Prussia and a new Italy. But a moment later, reverting from Napoleon III to Napoleon I, he would point out that the equipment was not properly polished, and would insist on tasting the men's rations. And at home, in his private life, it was for the wives of middle class officers (provided that their husbands were not freemasons) that he would bring out not only a dinner service of royal blue Sèvres, fit for an Ambassador (which had been given to his father by Napoleon, and appeared even more priceless in the commonplace house on a provincial street in which he was living, like those rare porcelains which tourists admire with a special delight in the rustic china-cupboard of some old manor that has been converted into a comfortable and prosperous farmhouse), but other gifts of the Emperor also: those noble and charming manners, which too would have won admiration in some diplomatic post abroad, if, for some men, it did not mean a lifelong condemnation to the most unjust form of ostracism, merely to be well born; his easy gestures, his kindness, his grace, and, embedding beneath an enamel that was of royal blue, also glorious images, the mysterious, illuminated, living reliquary of his gaze. And, in treating of the social relations with the middle classes which the Prince had at Doncières, it may be as well to add these few words. The lieutenant-colonel played the piano beautifully; the senior medical officer's wife sang like a Conservatoire medallist. This latter couple, as well as the lieutenant-colonel and his wife, used to dine every week with M. de Borodino. They were flattered, unquestionably, knowing that when the Prince went to Paris on leave he dined with Mme. de Pourtalès, and the Murats, and people like that. "But," they said to themselves, "he's just a captain, after all; he's only too glad to get us to come. Still, he's a real friend, you know." But when M. de Borodino, who had long been pulling every possible wire to secure an appointment for himself nearer Paris, was posted to Beauvais, he packed up and went, and forgot as completely the two musical couples as he forgot the Doncières theatre and the little restaurant to which he used often to send out for his luncheon, and, to their great indignation, neither the lieutenant-colonel nor the senior medical officer, who had so often sat at his table, ever had so much as a single word from him for the rest of their lives.

One morning, Saint-Loup confessed to me that he had written to my grandmother to give her news of me, with the suggestion that, since there was telephonic connexion between Paris and Doncières, she might make use of it to speak to me. In short, that very day she was to give me a call, and he advised me to be at the post office at about a quarter to four. The telephone was not yet at that date as commonly in use as it is to-day. And yet habit requires so short a time to divest of their mystery the sacred forces with which we are in contact, that, not having had my call at once, the only thought in my mind was that it was very slow, and badly managed, and I almost decided to lodge a complaint. Like all of us nowadays I found not rapid enough for my liking in its abrupt changes the admirable sorcery for which a few moments are enough to bring before us, invisible but present, the person to whom we have been wishing to speak, and who, while still sitting at his table, in the town in which he lives (in my grandmother's case, Paris), under another sky than ours, in weather that is not necessarily the same, in the midst of circumstances and worries of which we know nothing, but of which he is going to inform us, finds himself suddenly transported hundreds of miles (he and all the surroundings in which he remains immured) within reach of our ear, at the precise moment which our fancy has ordained. And we are like the person in the fairy-tale to whom a sorceress, on his uttering the wish, makes appear with supernatural clearness his grandmother or his betrothed in the act of turning over a book, of shedding tears, of gathering flowers, quite close to the spectator and yet ever so remote, in the place in which she actually is at the moment. We need only, so that the miracle may be accomplished, apply our lips to the magic orifice and invoke—occasionally for rather longer than seems to us necessary, I admit—the Vigilant Virgins to whose voices we listen every day without ever coming to know their faces, and who are our Guardian Angels in the dizzy realm of darkness whose portals they so jealously keep; the All Powerful by whose intervention the absent rise up at our side, without our being permitted to set eyes on them; the Danaids of the Unseen who without ceasing empty, fill, transmit the urns of sound; the ironic Furies who, just as we were murmuring a confidence to a friend, in the hope that no one was listening, cry brutally: "I hear you!"; the ever infuriated servants of the Mystery, the umbrageous priestesses of the Invisible, the Young Ladies of the Telephone.

And, the moment our call has sounded, in the night filled with phantoms to which our ears alone are unsealed, a tiny sound, an abstract sound—the sound of distance overcome—and the voice of the dear one speaks to us.

It is she, it is her voice that is speaking, that is there. But how remote it is! How often have I been unable to listen without anguish, as though, confronted by the impossibility of seeing, except after long hours of journeying, her whose voice has been so close to my ear, I felt more clearly the sham and illusion of meetings apparently most pleasant, and at what a distance we may be from the people we love at the moment when it seems that we have only to stretch out our hand to seize and hold them. A real presence indeed that voice so near—in actual separation. But a premonition also of an eternal separation! Over and again, as I listened in this way, without seeing her who spoke to me from so far away, it has seemed to me that the voice was crying to me from depths out of which one does not rise again, and I have known the anxiety that was one day to wring my heart when a voice should thus return (alone, and attached no longer to a body which I was never more to see), to murmur, in my ear, words I would fain have kissed as they issued from lips for ever turned to dust.

This afternoon, alas, at Doncières, the miracle did not occur. When I reached the post office, my grandmother's call had already been received; I stepped into the box; the line was engaged; some one was talking who probably did not realise that there was nobody to answer him, for when I raised the receiver to my ear, the lifeless block began squeaking like Punchinello; I silenced it, as one silences a puppet, by putting it back on its hook, but, like Punchinello, as soon as I took it again in my hand, it resumed its gabbling. At length, giving it up as hopeless, by hanging up the receiver once and for all, I stifled the convulsions of this vociferous stump which kept up its chatter until the last moment, and went in search of the operator, who told me to wait a little; then I spoke, and, after a few seconds of silence, suddenly I heard that voice which I supposed myself, mistakenly, to know so well; for always until then, every time that my grandmother had talked to me, I had been accustomed to follow what she was saying on the open score of her face, in which the eyes figured so largely; but her voice itself I was hearing this afternoon for the first time. And because that voice appeared to me to have altered in its proportions from the moment that it was a whole, and reached me in this way alone and without the accompaniment of her face and features, I discovered for the first time how sweet that voice was; perhaps, too, it had never been so sweet, for my grandmother, knowing me to be alone and unhappy, felt that she might let herself go in the outpouring of an affection which, on her principle of education, she usually restrained and kept hidden. It was sweet, but also how sad it was, first of all on account of its very sweetness, a sweetness drained almost—more than any but a few human voices can ever have been—of every element of resistance to others, of all selfishness; fragile by reason of its delicacy it seemed at every moment ready to break, to expire in a pure flow of tears; then, too, having it alone beside me, seen, without the mask of her face, I noticed for the first time the sorrows that had scarred it in the course of a lifetime.

Was it, however, solely the voice that, because it was alone, gave me this new impression which tore my heart? Not at all; it was rather that this isolation of the voice was like a symbol, a presentation, a direct consequence of another isolation, that of my grandmother, separated, for the first time in my life, from myself. The orders or prohibitions which she addressed to me at every moment in the ordinary course of my life, the tedium of obedience or the fire of rebellion which neutralised the affection that I felt for her were at this moment eliminated, and indeed might be eliminated for ever (since my grandmother no longer insisted on having me with her under her control, was in the act of expressing her hope that I would stay at Doncières altogether, or would at any rate extend my visit for as long as possible, seeing that both my health and my work seemed likely to benefit by the change); also, what I held compressed in this little bell that was ringing in my ear was, freed from the conflicting pressures which had, every day hitherto, given it a counterpoise, and from this moment irresistible, carrying me altogether away, our mutual affection. My grandmother, by telling me to stay, filled me with an anxious, an insensate longing to return. This freedom of action which for the future she allowed me and to which I had never dreamed that she would consent, appeared to me suddenly as sad as might be my freedom of action after her death (when I should still love her and she would for ever have abandoned me). "Granny!" I cried to her, "Granny!" and would fain have kissed her, but I had beside me only that voice, a phantom, as impalpable as that which would come perhaps to revisit me when my grandmother was dead. "Speak to me!" but then it happened that, left more solitary still, I ceased to catch the sound of her voice. My grandmother could no longer hear me; she was no longer in communication with me; we had ceased to stand face to face, to be audible to one another; I continued to call her, sounding the empty night, in which I felt that her appeals also must be straying. I was shaken by the same anguish which, in the distant past, I had felt once before, one day when, a little child, in a crowd, I had lost her, an anguish due less to my not finding her than to the thought that she must be searching for me, must be saying to herself that I was searching for her; an anguish comparable to that which I was to feel on the day when we speak to those who can no longer reply and whom we would so love to have hear all the things that we have not told them, and our assurance that we are not unhappy. It seemed as though it were already a beloved ghost that I had allowed to lose herself in the ghostly world, and, standing alone before the instrument, I went on vainly repeating: "Granny! Granny!" as Orpheus, left alone, repeats the name of his dead wife. I decided to leave the post office, to go and find Robert at his restaurant, in order to tell him that, as I was half expecting a telegram which would oblige me to return to Paris, I wished at all costs to find out at what times the trains left. And yet, before reaching this decision, I felt I must make one attempt more to invoke the Daughters of the Night, the Messengers of the Word, the Deities without form or feature; but the capricious Guardians had not deigned once again to unclose the miraculous portals, or more probably, had not been able; in vain might they untiringly appeal, as was their custom, to the venerable inventor of printing and the young prince, collector of impressionist paintings and driver of motor-cars (who was Captain de Borodino's nephew); Gutenberg and Wagram left their supplications unanswered, and I came away, feeling that the Invisible would continue to turn a deaf ear.

When I came among Robert and his friends, I withheld the confession that my heart was no longer with them, that my departure was now irrevocably fixed. Saint-Loup appeared to believe me, but I learned afterwards that he had from the first moment realised that my uncertainty was feigned and that he would not see me again next day. And while, letting their plates grow cold, his friends joined him in searching through the time-table for a train which would take me to Paris, and while we heard in the cold, starry night the whistling of the engines on the line, I certainly felt no longer the same peace of mind which on all these last evenings I had derived from the friendship of the former and the latter's distant passage. And yet they did not fail me this evening, performing the same office in a different way. My departure overpowered me less when I was no longer obliged to think of it by myself, when I felt that there was concentrated on what was to be done the more normal, more wholesome activity of my strenuous friends, Robert's brothers in arms, and of those other strong creatures, the trains, whose going and coming, night and morning, between Doncières and Paris, broke up in retrospect what had been too compact and insupportable in my long isolation from my grandmother into daily possibilities of return.

"I don't doubt the truth of what you're saying, or that you aren't thinking of leaving us just yet," said Saint-Loup, smiling; "but pretend you are going, and come and say good-bye to me to-morrow morning; early, otherwise there's a risk of my not seeing you; I'm going out to luncheon, I've got leave from the Captain; I shall have to be back in barracks by two, as we are to be on the march all afternoon. I suppose the man to whose house I'm going, a couple of miles out, will manage to get me back in time."

Scarcely had he uttered these words when a messenger came for me from my hotel; the telephone operator had sent to find me. I ran to the post office, for it was nearly closing time. The word 'trunks' recurred incessantly in the answers given me by the officials. I was in a fever of anxiety, for it was my grandmother who had asked for me. The office was closing for the night. Finally I got my connexion. "Is that you, Granny?" A woman's voice, with a strong English accent, answered: "Yes, but I don't know your voice." Neither did I recognise the voice that was speaking to me; besides, my grandmother called me *tu,* and not *vous*. And then all was explained. The young man for whom his grandmother had called on the telephone had a name almost identical with my own, and was staying in an annex of my hotel. This call coming on the very day on which I had been telephoning to my grandmother, I had never for a moment doubted that it was she who was asking for me. Whereas it was by pure coincidence that the post office and the hotel had combined to make a twofold error.

The following morning I rose late, and failed to catch Saint-Loup, who had already started for the country house where he was invited to luncheon. About half past one, I had decided to go in any case to the barracks, so as to be there before he arrived, when, as I was crossing one of the avenues on the way there, I noticed, coming behind me in the same direction as myself, a tilbury which, as it overtook me, obliged me to jump out of its way; an N.C.O. was driving it, wearing an eyeglass; it was Saint-Loup. By his side was the friend whose guest he had been at luncheon, and whom I had met once before at the hotel where we dined. I did not dare shout to Robert since he was not alone, but, in the hope that he would stop and pick me up, I attracted his attention by a sweeping wave of my hat, which might be regarded as due to the presence of a stranger. I knew that Robert was short-sighted; still, I should have supposed that, provided he saw me at all, he could not fail to recognise me; he did indeed see my salute, and returned it, but without stopping; driving on at full speed, without a smile, without moving a muscle of his face, he confined himself to keeping his hand raised for a minute to the peak of his cap, as though he were acknowledging the salute of a trooper whom he did not know personally. I ran to the barracks, but it was a long way; when I arrived, the regiment was parading on the square, on which I was not allowed to stand, and I was heart-broken at not having been able to say good-bye to Saint-Loup; I went up to his room, but he had gone; I was reduced to questioning a group of sick details, recruits who had been excused route-marches, the young graduate, one of the 'old soldiers,' who were watching the regiment parade.

"You haven't seen Serjeant Saint-Loup, have you, by any chance?" I asked.

"He's gone on parade, sir," said the old soldier.

"I never saw him," said the graduate.

"You never saw him," exclaimed the old soldier, losing all interest in me, "you never saw our famous Saint-Loup, the figure he's cutting with his new breeches! When the Capstan sees that, officer's cloth, my word!"

"Oh, you're a wonder, you are; officer's cloth," replied the young graduate, who, reported 'sick in quarters,' was excused marching and tried, not without some misgivings, to be on easy terms with the veterans. "This officer's cloth you speak of is cloth like that, is it?"

"Sir?" asked the old soldier angrily.

He was indignant that the young graduate should throw doubt on the breeches' being made of officer's cloth, but, being a Breton, coming from a village that went by the name of Penguern-Stereden, having learned French with as much difficulty as if it had been English or German, whenever he felt himself overcome by emotion he would go on saying 'Sir?' to give himself time to find words, then, after this preparation, let loose his eloquence, confining himself to the repetition of certain words which he knew better than others, but without haste, taking every precaution to gloss over his unfamiliarity with the pronunciation.

"Ah! It is cloth like that," he broke out, with a fury the intensity of which increased as the speed of his utterance diminished. "Ah! It is cloth like that; when I tell you that it is, officer's cloth, when-I-tell-you-a-thing, if-I-tell-you-a-thing, it's because I know, I should think."

"Very well, then;" replied the young graduate, overcome by the force of this argument. "Keep your hair on, old boy."

"There, look, there's the Capstan coming along. No, but just look at Saint-Loup; the way he throws his leg out; and his head. Would you call that a non-com? And his eyeglass; oh, he's hot stuff, he is."

I asked these troopers, who did not seem at all embarrassed by my presence, whether I too might look out of the window. They neither objected to my doing so nor moved to make room for me. I saw Captain de Borodino go majestically by, putting his horse into a trot, and apparently under the illusion that he was taking part in the Battle of Austerlitz. A few loiterers had stopped by the gate to see the regiment file out. Erect on his charger, his face inclined to plumpness, his cheeks of an Imperial fulness, his eye lucid, the Prince must have been the victim of some hallucination, as I was myself whenever, after the tramway-car had passed, the silence that followed its rumble seemed to me to throb and echo with a vaguely musical palpitation. I was wretched at not having said good-bye to Saint-Loup, but I went nevertheless, for my one anxiety was to return to my grandmother; always until then, in this little country town, when I thought of what my grandmother must be doing by herself, I had pictured her as she was when with me, suppressing my own personality but without taking into account the effects of such a suppression; now, I had to free myself, at the first possible moment, in her arms, from the phantom, hitherto unsuspected and suddenly called into being by her voice, of a grandmother really separated from me, resigned, having, what I had never yet thought of her as having, a definite age, who had just received a letter from me in an empty house, as I had once before imagined Mamma in a house by herself, when I had left her to go to Balbec.

Alas, this phantom was just what I did see when, entering the drawing-room before my grandmother had been told of my return, I found her there, reading. I was in the room, or rather I was not yet in the room since she was not aware of my presence, and, like a woman whom one surprises at a piece of work which she will lay aside if anyone comes in, she had abandoned herself to a train of thoughts which she had never allowed to be visible by me. Of myself—thanks to that privilege which does not last but which one enjoys during the brief moment of return, the faculty of being a spectator, so to speak, of one's own absence,—there was present only the witness, the observer, with a hat and travelling coat, the stranger who does not belong to the house, the photographer who has called to take a photograph of places which one will never see again. The process that mechanically occurred in my eyes when I caught sight of my grandmother was indeed a photograph. We never see the people who are dear to us save in the animated system, the perpetual motion of our incessant love for them, which before allowing the images that their faces present to reach us catches them in its vortex, flings them back upon the idea that we have always had of them, makes them adhere to it, coincide with it. How, since into the forehead, the cheeks of my grandmother I had been accustomed to read all the most delicate, the most permanent qualities of her mind; how, since every casual glance is an act of necromancy, each face that we love a mirror of the past, how could I have failed to overlook what in her had become dulled and changed, seeing that in the most trivial spectacles of our daily life, our eye, charged with thought, neglects, as would a classical tragedy, every image that does not assist the action of the play and retains only those that may help to make its purpose intelligible. But if, in place of our eye, it should be a purely material object, a photographic plate, that has watched the action, then what we shall see, in the courtyard of the Institute, for example, will be, instead of the dignified emergence of an Academician who is going to hail a cab, his staggering gait, his precautions to avoid tumbling upon his back, the parabola of his fall, as though he were drunk, or the ground frozen over. So is it when some casual sport of chance prevents our intelligent and pious affection from coming forward in time to hide from our eyes what they ought never to behold, when it is forestalled by our eyes, and they, arising first in the field and having it to themselves, set to work mechanically, like films, and shew us, in place of the loved friend who has long ago ceased to exist but whose death our affection has always hitherto kept concealed from us, the new person whom a hundred times daily that affection has clothed with a dear and cheating likeness. And, as a sick man who for long has not looked at his own reflexion, and has kept his memory of the face that he never sees refreshed from the ideal image of himself that he carries in his mind, recoils on catching sight in the glass, in the midst of an arid waste of cheek, of the sloping red structure of a nose as huge as one of the pyramids of Egypt, I, for whom my grandmother was still myself, I who had never seen her save in my own soul, always at the same place in the past, through the transparent sheets of contiguous, overlapping memories, suddenly in our drawing-room which formed part of a new world, that of time, that in which dwell the strangers of whom we say "He's begun to age a good deal," for the first time and for a moment only, since she vanished at once, I saw, sitting on the sofa, beneath the lamp, red-faced, heavy and common, sick, lost in thought, following the lines of a book with eyes that seemed hardly sane, a dejected old woman whom I did not know.

My request to be allowed to inspect the Elstirs in Mme. de Guermantes's collection had been met by Saint-Loup with: "I will answer for her." And indeed, as ill luck would have it, it was he and he alone who did answer. We answer readily enough for other people when, setting our mental stage with the little puppets that represent them, we manipulate these to suit our fancy. No doubt even then we take into account the difficulties due to another person's nature being different from our own, and we do not fail to have recourse to some plan of action likely to influence that nature, an appeal to his material interest, persuasion, the rousing of emotion, which will neutralise contrary tendencies on his part. But these differences from our own nature, it is still our own nature that is imagining them, these difficulties, it is we that are raising them; these compelling motives, it is we that are applying them. And so with the actions which before our mind's eye we have made the other person rehearse, and which make him act as we choose; when we wish to see him perform them in real life, the case is altered, we come up against unseen resistances which may prove insuperable. One of the strongest is doubtless that which may be developed in a woman who is not in love with him by the disgust inspired in her, a fetid, insurmountable loathing, by the man who is in love with her; during the long weeks in which Saint-Loup still did not come to Paris, his aunt, to whom I had no doubt of his having written begging her to do so, never once asked me to call at her house to see the Elstirs.

I perceived signs of coldness on the part of another occupant of the building. This was Jupien. Did he consider that I ought to have gone in and said how d'ye do to him, on my return from Doncières, before even going upstairs to our own flat? My mother said no, that there was nothing unusual about it. Françoise had told her that he was like that, subject to sudden fits of ill humour, without any cause. These invariably passed off after a little time.

Meanwhile the winter was drawing to an end. One morning, after several weeks of showers and storms, I heard in my chimney—instead of the wind, formless, elastic, sombre, which convulsed me with a longing to go to the sea—the cooing of the pigeons that were nesting in the wall outside; shimmering, unexpected, like a first hyacinth, gently tearing open its fostering heart that there might shoot forth, purple and satin-soft, its flower of sound, letting in like an opened window into my bedroom still shuttered and dark the heat, the dazzling brightness, the fatigue of a first fine day. That morning, I was surprised to find myself humming a music-hall tune which had never entered my head since the year in which I had been going to Florence and Venice. So profoundly does the atmosphere, as good days and bad recur, act on our organism and draw from dim shelves where we had forgotten them, the melodies written there which our memory could not decipher. Presently a more conscious dreamer accompanied this musician to whom I was listening inside myself, without having recognised at first what he was playing.

I quite realised that it was not for any reason peculiar to Balbec that on my arrival there I had failed to find in its church the charm which it had had for me before I knew it; that at Florence or Parma or Venice my imagination could no more take the place of my eyes when I looked at the sights there. I realised this. Similarly, one New Year's afternoon, as night fell, standing before a column of playbills, I had discovered the illusion that lies in our thinking that certain solemn holidays differ essentially from the other days in the calendar. And yet I could not prevent my memory of the time during which I had looked forward to spending Easter in Florence from continuing to make that festival the atmosphere, so to speak, of the City of Flowers, to give at once to Easter Day something Florentine and to Florence something Paschal. Easter was still a long way off; but in the range of days that stretched out before me the days of Holy Week stood out more clearly at the end of those that merely came between. Touched by a far-flung ray, like certain houses in a village which one sees from a distance when the rest are in shadow, they had caught and kept all the sun.

The weather had now become milder. And my parents themselves, by urging me to take more exercise, gave me an excuse for resuming my morning walks. I had meant to give them up, since they meant my meeting Mme. de Guermantes. But it was for this very reason that I kept thinking all the time of those walks, which led to my finding, every moment, a fresh reason for taking them, a reason that had no connexion with Mme. de Guermantes and no difficulty in convincing me that, had she never existed, I should still have taken a walk, without fail, at that hour every morning.

Alas, if to me meeting any person other than herself would not have mattered, I felt that to her meeting anyone in the world except myself would have been endurable. It happened that, in the course of her morning walks, she received the salutations of plenty of fools whom she regarded as such. But the appearance of these in her path seemed to her, if not to hold out any promise of pleasure, to be at any rate the result of mere accident. And she stopped them at times, for there are moments in which one wants to escape from oneself, to accept the hospitality offered by the soul of another person, provided always that the other, however modest and plain it may be, is a different soul, whereas in my heart she was exasperated to feel that what she would have found was herself. And so, even when I had, for taking the same way as she, another reason than my desire to see her, I trembled like a guilty man as she came past; and sometimes, so as to neutralise anything extravagant that there might seem to have been in my overtures, I would barely acknowledge her bow, or would fasten my eyes on her face without raising my hat, and succeed only in making her angrier than ever, and begin to regard me as insolent and ill-bred besides.

She was now wearing lighter, or at any rate brighter, clothes, and would come strolling down the street in which already, as though it were spring, in front of the narrow shops that were squeezed in between the huge fronts of the old aristocratic mansions, over the booths of the butter-woman and the fruit-woman and the vegetable-woman, awnings were spread to protect them from the sun. I said to myself that the woman whom I could see far off, walking, opening her sunshade, crossing the street, was, in the opinion of those best qualified to judge, the greatest living exponent of the art of performing those movements and of making out of them something exquisitely lovely. Meanwhile she was advancing towards me, unconscious of this widespread reputation, her narrow, stubborn body, which had absorbed none of it, was bent stiffly forward under a scarf of violet silk; her clear, sullen eyes looked absently in front of her, and had perhaps caught sight of me; she was biting her lip; I saw her straighten her muff, give alms to a beggar, buy a bunch of violets from a flower-seller, with the same curiosity that I should have felt in watching the strokes of a great painter's brush. And when, as she reached me, she gave me a bow that was accompanied sometimes by a faint smile, it was as though she had sketched in colour for me, adding a personal inscription to myself, a drawing that was a masterpiece of art. Each of her gowns seemed to me her natural, necessary surroundings, like the projection around her of a particular aspect of her soul. On one of these Lenten mornings, when she was on her way out to luncheon, I met her wearing a gown of bright red velvet, cut slightly open at the throat. The face of Mme. de Guermantes appeared to be dreaming, beneath its pile of fair hair. I was less sad than usual because the melancholy of her expression, the sort of claustration which the startling hue of her gown set between her and the rest of the world, made her seem somehow lonely and unhappy, and this comforted me. The gown struck me as being the materialisation round about her of the scarlet rays of a heart which I did not recognise as hers and might have been able, perhaps, to console; sheltered in the mystical light of the garment with its gently flowing folds, she made me think of some Saint of the early ages of Christianity. After which I felt ashamed of afflicting with the sight of myself this holy martyr. "But, after all, the streets are public."

The streets are public, I reminded myself, giving a different meaning to the words, and marvelling that indeed in the crowded thoroughfare often soaked with rain, which made it beautiful and precious as a street sometimes is in the old towns of Italy, the Duchesse de Guermantes mingled with the public life of the world moments of her own secret life, shewing herself thus to all and sundry, jostled by every passer-by, with the splendid gratuitousness of the greatest works of art. As I had been out in the morning, after staying awake all night, in the afternoon my parents would tell me to lie down for a little and try to sleep. There is no need, when one is trying to find sleep, to give much thought to the quest, but habit is very useful, and even freedom from thought. But in these afternoon hours both were lacking. Before going to sleep, I devoted so much time to thinking that I should not be able to sleep, that even after I was asleep a little of my thought remained. It was no more than a glimmer in the almost total darkness, but it was bright enough to cast a reflexion in my sleep, first of the idea that I could not sleep, and then, a reflexion of this reflexion, that it was in my sleep that I had had the idea that I was not asleep, then, by a further refraction, my awakening . . . to a fresh doze in which I was trying to tell some friends who had come into my room that, a moment earlier, when I was asleep, I had imagined that I was not asleep. These shades were barely distinguishable; it would have required a keen—and quite useless—delicacy of perception to seize them all. Similarly, in later years, at Venice, long after the sun had set, when it seemed to be quite dark, I have seen, thanks to the echo, itself imperceptible, of a last note of light, held indefinitely on the surface of the canals, as though some optical pedal were being pressed, the reflexion of the palaces unfurled, as though for all time, in a darker velvet, on the crepuscular greyness of the water. One of my dreams was the synthesis of what my imagination had often sought to depict, in my waking hours, of a certain seagirt place and its mediaeval past. In my sleep I saw a gothic fortress rising from a sea whose waves were stilled as in a painted window. An arm of the sea cut the town in two; the green water stretched to my feet; it bathed on the opposite shore the foundations of an oriental church, and beyond it houses which existed already in the fourteenth century, so that to go across to them would have been to ascend the stream of time. This dream in which nature had learned from art, in which the sea had turned gothic, this dream in which I longed to attain, in which I believed that I was attaining to the impossible, it seemed to me that I had often dreamed it before. But as it is the property of what we imagine in our sleep to multiply itself in the past, and to appear, even when novel, familiar, I supposed that I was mistaken. I noticed, however, that I did frequently have this dream.

The limitations, too, that are common to all sleep were reflected in mine, but in a symbolical manner; I could not in the darkness make out the faces of the friends who were in the room, for we sleep with our eyes shut. I, who could carry on endless arguments with myself while I dreamed, as soon as I tried to speak to these friends felt the words stick in my throat, for we do not speak distinctly in our sleep; I wanted to go to them, and I could not move my limbs, for we do not walk when we are asleep either; and suddenly I was ashamed to be seen by them, for we sleep without our clothes. So, my eyes blinded, my lips sealed, my limbs fettered, my body naked, the figure of sleep which my sleep itself projected had the appearance of those great allegorical figures (in one of which Giotto has portrayed Envy with a serpent in her mouth) of which Swann had given me photographs.

Saint-Loup came to Paris for a few hours only. He came with assurances that he had had no opportunity of mentioning me to his aunt. "She's not being at all nice just now, Oriane isn't," he explained, with innocent self-betrayal. "She's not my old Oriane any longer, they've gone and changed her. I assure you, it's not worth while bothering your head about her. You pay her far too great a compliment. You wouldn't care to meet my cousin Poictiers?" he went on, without stopping to reflect that this could not possibly give me any pleasure. "Quite an intelligent young woman, she is; you'd like her. She's married to my cousin, the Duc de Poictiers, who is a good fellow, but a bit slow for her. I've told her about you. She said I was to bring you to see her. She's much better looking than Oriane, and younger, too. Really a nice person, don't you know, really a good sort." These were expressions recently—and all the more ardently—taken up by Robert, which meant that the person in question had a delicate nature. "I don't go so far as to say she's a Dreyfusard, you must remember the sort of people she lives among; still, she did say to me: 'If he is innocent, how ghastly for him to be shut up on the Devil's Isle.' You see what I mean, don't you? And then she's the sort of woman who does a tremendous lot for her old governesses; she's given orders that they're never to be sent in by the servants' stair, when they come to the house. She's a very good sort, I assure you. The real reason why Oriane doesn't like her is that she feels she's the cleverer of the two."

Although completely absorbed in the pity which she felt for one of the Guermantes footmen—who had no chance of going to see his girl, even when the Duchess was out, for it would immediately have been reported to her from the lodge,—Françoise was heartbroken at not having been in the house at the moment of Saint-Loup's visit, but this was because now she herself paid visits also. She never failed to go out on the days when I most wanted her. It was always to see her brother, her niece and, more particularly, her own daughter, who had recently come to live in Paris. The intimate nature of these visits itself increased the irritation that I felt at being deprived of her services, for I had a foreboding that she would speak of them as being among those duties from which there was no dispensation, according to the laws laid down at Saint-André-des-Champs. And so I never listened to her excuses without an ill humour which was highly unjust to her, and was brought to a climax by the way Françoise had of saying not: "I have been to see my brother," or "I have been to see my niece," but "I have been to see the brother," "I just looked in as I passed to bid good day to the niece" (or "to my niece the butcheress"). As for her daughter, Françoise would have been glad to see her return to Combray. But this recent Parisian, making use, like a woman of fashion, of abbreviations, though hers were of a vulgar kind, protested that the week she was going shortly to spend at Combray would seem quite long enough without so much as a sight of "the *Intran.*" She was still less willing to go to Françoise's sister, who lived in a mountainous country, for "mountains," said the daughter, giving to the adjective a new and terrible meaning, "aren't really interesting." She could not make up her mind to go back to Méséglise, where "the people are so stupid," where in the market the gossips at their stalls would call cousins with her, and say "Why, it's never poor Bazireau's daughter?" She would sooner die than go back and bury herself down there, now that she had "tasted the life of Paris," and Françoise, traditionalist as she was, smiled complacently nevertheless at the spirit of innovation that was incarnate in this new Parisian when she said: "Very well, mother, if you don't get your day out, you have only to send me a pneu."

The weather had turned chilly again. "Go out? What for? To catch your death?" said Françoise, who preferred to remain in the house during the week which her daughter and brother and the butcher-niece had gone to spend at Combray. Being, moreover, the last surviving adherent of the sect in whom persisted obscurely the doctrine of my aunt Léonie—a natural philosopher—Françoise would add, speaking of this unseasonable weather: "It is the remnant of the wrath of God!" But I responded to her complaints only in a languid smile; all the more indifferent to these predictions, in that whatever befell it would be fine for me; already I could see the morning sun shine on the slope of Fiesole, I warmed myself in its rays; their strength obliged me to half open, half shut my eyelids, smiling the while, and my eyelids, like alabaster lamps, were filled with a rosy glow.

It was not only the bells that came from Italy, Italy had come with them. My faithful hands would not lack flowers to honour the anniversary of the pilgrimage which I ought to have made long ago, for since, here in Paris, the weather had turned cold again as in another year at the time of our preparations for departure at the end of Lent, in the liquid, freezing air which bathed the chestnuts and planes on the boulevards, the tree in the courtyard of our house, there were already opening their petals, as in a bowl of pure water, the narcissi, the jonquils, the anemones of the Ponte Vecchio.

My father had informed us that he now knew, from his friend A. J., where M. de Norpois was going when he met him about the place.

"It's to see Mme. de Villeparisis, they are great friends; I never knew anything about it. It seems she's a delightful person, a most superior woman. You ought to go and call on her," he told me. "Another thing that surprised me very much. He spoke to me of M. de Guermantes as quite a distinguished man; I had always taken him for a boor. It seems, he knows an enormous amount, and has perfect taste, only he's very proud of his name and his connexions. But for that matter, according to Norpois, he has a tremendous position, not only here but all over Europe. It appears, the Austrian Emperor and the Tsar treat him just like one of themselves. Old Norpois told me that Mme. de Villeparisis had taken quite a fancy to you, and that you would meet all sorts of interesting people in her house. He paid a great tribute to you; you will see him if you go there, and he may have some good advice for you even if you are going to be a writer. For you're not likely to do anything else; I can see that. It might turn out quite a good career; it's not what I should have chosen for you, myself; but you'll be a man in no time now, we shan't always be here to look after you, and we mustn't prevent you from following your vocation."

If only I had been able to start writing! But whatever the conditions in which I approached the task (as, too, alas, the undertakings not to touch alcohol, to go to bed early, to sleep, to keep fit), whether it were with enthusiasm, with method, with pleasure, in depriving myself of a walk, or postponing my walk and keeping it in reserve as a reward of industry, taking advantage of an hour of good health, utilising the inactivity forced on me by a day of illness, what always emerged in the end from all my effort was a virgin page, undefiled by any writing, ineluctable as that forced card which in certain tricks one invariably is made to draw, however carefully one may first have shuffled the pack. I was merely the instrument of habits of not working, of not going to bed, of not sleeping, which must find expression somehow, cost what it might; if I offered them no resistance, if I contented myself with the pretext they seized from the first opportunity that the day afforded them of acting as they chose, I escaped without serious injury, I slept for a few hours after all, towards morning, I read a little, I did not over-exert myself; but if I attempted to thwart them, if I pretended to go to bed early, to drink only water, to work, they grew restive, they adopted strong measures, they made me really ill, I was obliged to double my dose of alcohol, did not lie down in bed for two days and nights on end, could not even read, and I vowed that another time I would be more reasonable, that is to say less wise, like the victim of an assault who allows himself to be robbed for fear, should he offer resistance, of being murdered.

My father, in the meantime, had met M. de Guermantes once or twice, and, now that M. de Norpois had told him that the Duke was a remarkable man, had begun to pay more attention to what he said. As it happened, they met in the courtyard and discussed Mme. de Villeparisis. "He tells me, she's his aunt; 'Viparisi,' he pronounces it. He tells me, too, she's an extraordinarily able woman. In fact he said she kept a School of Wit," my father announced to us, impressed by the vagueness of this expression, which he had indeed come across now and then in volumes of memoirs, but without attaching to it any definite meaning. My mother, so great was her respect for him, when she saw that he did not dismiss as of no importance the fact that Mme. de Villeparisis kept a School of Wit, decided that this must be of some consequence. Albeit from my grandmother she had known all the time the exact amount of the Marquise's intellectual worth, it was immediately enhanced in her eyes. My grandmother, who was not very well just then, was not in favour at first of the suggested visit, and afterwards lost interest in the matter. Since we had moved into our new flat, Mme. de Villeparisis had several times asked my grandmother to call upon her. And invariably my grandmother had replied that she was not going out just at present, in one of those letters which, by a new habit of hers which we did not understand, she no longer sealed herself, but employed Françoise to lick the envelopes for her. As for myself, without any very clear picture in my mind of this School of Wit, I should not have been greatly surprised to find the old lady from Balbec installed behind a desk, as, for that matter, I eventually did.

My father would have been glad to know, into the bargain, whether the Ambassador's support would be worth many votes to him at the Institute, for which he had thoughts of standing as an independent candidate. To tell the truth, while he did not venture to doubt that he would have M. de Norpois's support, he was by no means certain of it. He had thought it merely malicious gossip when they assured him at the Ministry that M. de Norpois, wishing to be himself the only representative there of the Institute, would put every possible obstacle in the way of my father's candidature, which besides would be particularly awkward for him at that moment, since he was supporting another candidate already. And yet, when M. Leroy-Beaulieu had first advised him to stand, and had reckoned up his chances, my father had been struck by the fact that, among the colleagues upon whom he could count for support, the eminent economist had not mentioned M. de Norpois. He dared not ask the Ambassador point-blank, but hoped that I should return from my call on Mme. de Villeparisis with his election as good as secured. This call was now imminent. That M. de Norpois would carry on propaganda calculated to assure my father the votes of at least two thirds of the Academy seemed to him all the more probable since the Ambassador's willingness to oblige was proverbial, those who liked him least admitting that no one else took such pleasure in being of service. And besides, at the Ministry, his protective influence was extended over my father far more markedly than over any other official.

My father had also another encounter about this time, but one at which his extreme surprise ended in equal indignation. In the street one day he ran into Mme. Sazerat, whose life in Paris her comparative poverty restricted to occasional visits to a friend. There was no one who bored my father quite so intensely as did Mme. Sazerat, so much so that Mamma was obliged, once a year, to intercede with him in sweet and suppliant tones: "My dear, I really must invite Mme. Sazerat to the house, just once; she won't stay long;" and even: "Listen, dear, I am going to ask you to make a great sacrifice; do go and call upon Mme. Sazerat. You know I hate bothering you, but it would be so nice of you." He would laugh, raise various objections, and go to pay the call. And so, for all that Mme. Sazerat did not appeal to him, on catching sight of her in the street my father went towards her, hat in hand; but to his profound astonishment Mme. Sazerat confined her greeting to the frigid bow enforced by politeness towards a person who is guilty of some disgraceful action or has been condemned to live, for the future, in another hemisphere. My father had come home speechless with rage. Next day my mother met Mme. Sazerat in some one's house. She did not offer my mother her hand, but only smiled at her with a vague and melancholy air as one smiles at a person with whom one used to play as a child, but with whom one has since severed all one's relations because she has led an abandoned life, has married a convict or (what is worse still) a co-respondent. Now, from all time my parents had accorded to Mme. Sazerat, and inspired in her, the most profound respect. But (and of this my mother was ignorant) Mme. Sazerat, alone of her kind at Combray, was a Dreyfusard. My father, a friend of M. Méline, was convinced that Dreyfus was guilty. He had flatly refused to listen to some of his colleagues who had asked him to sign a petition demanding a fresh trial. He never spoke to me for a week, after learning that I had chosen to take a different line. His opinions were well known. He came near to being looked upon as a Nationalist. As for my grandmother, in whom alone of the family a generous doubt was likely to be kindled, whenever anyone spoke to her of the possible innocence of Dreyfus, she gave a shake of her head, the meaning of which we did not at the time understand, but which was like the gesture of a person who has been interrupted while thinking of more serious things. My mother, torn between her love for my father and her hope that I might turn out to have brains, preserved an impartiality which she expressed by silence. Finally my grandfather, who adored the Army (albeit his duties with the National Guard had been the bugbear of his riper years), could never, at Combray, see a regiment go by the garden railings without baring his head as the colonel and the colours passed. All this was quite enough to make Mme. Sazerat, who knew every incident of the disinterested and honourable careers of my father and grandfather, regard them as pillars of Injustice. We pardon the crimes of individuals, but not their participation in a collective crime. As soon as she knew my father to be an anti-Dreyfusard she set between him and herself continents and centuries. Which explains why, across such an interval of time and space, her bow had been imperceptible to my father, and why it had not occurred to her to hold out her hand, or to say a few words which would never have carried across the worlds that lay between.

Saint-Loup, who was coming anyhow to Paris, had promised to take me to Mme. de Villeparisis's, where I hoped, though I had not said so to him, that we might meet Mme. de Guermantes. He invited me to luncheon in a restaurant with his mistress, whom we were afterwards to accompany to a rehearsal. We were to go out in the morning and call for her at her home on the outskirts of Paris.

I had asked Saint-Loup that the restaurant to which we went for luncheon (in the lives of young noblemen with money to spend the restaurant plays as important a part as do bales of merchandise in Arabian stories), might, if possible, be that to which Aimé had told me that he would be going as head waiter until the Balbec season started. It was a great attraction to me who dreamed of so many expeditions and made so few to see again some one who formed part not merely of my memories of Balbec but of Balbec itself, who went there year after year, who when ill health or my studies compelled me to stay in Paris would be watching, just the same, through the long July afternoons while he waited for the guests to come in to dinner, the sun creep down the sky and set in the sea, through the glass panels of the great dining-room, behind which, at the hour when the light died, the motionless wings of vessels, smoky blue in the distance, looked like exotic and nocturnal moths in a show-case. Himself magnetised by his contact with the strong lodestone of Balbec, this head waiter became in turn a magnet attracting me. I hoped by talking to him to get at once into communication with Balbec, to have realised here in Paris something of the delights of travel.

I left the house early, with Françoise complaining bitterly because the footman who was engaged to be married had once again been prevented, the evening before, from going to see his girl. Françoise had found him in tears; he had been itching to go and strike the porter, but had restrained himself, for he valued his place.

Before reaching Saint-Loup's, where he was to be waiting for me at the door, I ran into Legrandin, of whom we had lost sight since our Combray days, and who, though now grown quite grey, had preserved his air of youthful candour. Seeing me, he stopped:

"Ah! So it's you," he exclaimed, "a man of fashion, and in a frock coat too! That is a livery in which my independent spirit would be ill at ease. It is true that you are a man of the world, I suppose, and go out paying calls! To go and dream, as I do, before some half ruined tomb, my flowing tie and jacket are not out of place. You know how I admire the charming quality of your soul; that is why I tell you how deeply I regret that you should go forth and deny it among the Gentiles. By being capable of remaining for a moment in the nauseating atmosphere—which I am unable to breathe—of a drawing-room, you pronounce on your own future the condemnation, the damnation of the Prophet. I can see it all, you frequent the 'light hearts,' the houses of the great, that is the vice of our middle class to-day. Ah! Those aristocrats! The Terror was greatly to blame for not cutting the heads off every one of them. They are all sinister debauchees, when they are not simply dreary idiots. Still, my poor boy, if that sort of thing amuses you! While you are on your way to your tea-party your old friend will be more fortunate than you, for alone in an outlying suburb he will be watching the pink moon rise in a violet sky. The truth is that I scarcely belong to this Earth upon which I feel myself such an exile; it takes all the force of the law of gravity to hold me here, to keep me from escaping into another sphere. I belong to a different planet. Good-bye; do not take amiss the old-time frankness of the peasant of the Vivonne, who has also remained a peasant of the Danube. To prove to you that I am your sincere well-wisher, I am going to send you my last novel. But you will not care for it; it is not deliquescent enough, not *fin de siècle* enough for you; it is too frank, too honest; what you want is Bergotte, you have confessed it, high game for the jaded palates of pleasure-seeking epicures. I suppose I am looked upon, in your set, as an old campaigner; I do wrong to put my heart into what I write, that is no longer done; besides, the life of the people is not distinguished enough to interest your little snobbicules. Go, get you gone, try to recall at times the words of Christ: 'Do this and ye shall live.' Farewell, Friend."

It was not with any particular resentment against Legrandin that I parted from him. Certain memories are like friends in common, they can bring about reconciliations; set down amid fields starred with buttercups, upon which were piled the ruins of feudal greatness, the little wooden bridge still joined us, Legrandin and me, as it joined the two banks of the Vivonne.

After coming out of a Paris in which, although spring had begun, the trees on the boulevards had hardly put on their first leaves, it was a marvel to Saint-Loup and myself, when the circle train had set us down at the suburban village in which his mistress was living, to see every cottage garden gay with huge festal altars of fruit trees in blossom. It was like one of those peculiar, poetical, ephemeral, local festivals which people travel long distances to attend on certain fixed occasions, only this one was held by Nature. The bloom of the cherry tree is stuck so close to its branches, like a white sheath, that from a distance, among the other trees that shewed as yet scarcely a flower or leaf, one might have taken it, on this day of sunshine that was still so cold, for snow, melted everywhere else, which still clung to the bushes. But the tall pear trees enveloped each house, each modest courtyard in a whiteness more vast, more uniform, more dazzling, as if all the dwellings, all the enclosed spaces in the village were on their way to make, on one solemn date, their first communion.

It had been a country village, and had kept its old mayor's office sunburned and brown, in front of which, in the place of maypoles and streamers, three tall pear trees were, as though for some civic and local festival, gallantly beflagged with white satin. These villages in the environs of Paris still have at their gates parks of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which were the 'follies' of the stewards and favourites of the great. A fruit-grower had utilised one of these which was sunk below the road for his trees, or had simply, perhaps, preserved the plan of an immense orchard of former days. Laid out in quincunxes, these pear trees, less crowded and not so far on as those that I had seen, formed great quadrilaterals—separated by low walls—of snowy blossom, on each side of which the light fell differently, so that all these airy roofless chambers seemed to belong to a Palace of the Sun, such as one might unearth in Crete or somewhere; and made one think also of the different ponds of a reservoir, or of those parts of the sea which man, for some fishery, or to plant oyster-beds, has subdivided, when one saw, varying with the orientation of the boughs, the light fall and play upon their trained arms as upon water warm with spring, and coax into unfolding here and there, gleaming amid the open, azure-panelled trellis of the branches, the foaming whiteness of a creamy, sunlit flower.

Never had Robert spoken to me so tenderly of his friend as he did during this walk. She alone had taken root in his heart; his future career in the Army, his position in society, his family, he was not, of course, indifferent altogether to these, but they were of no account compared with the veriest trifle that concerned his mistress. That alone had any importance in his eyes, infinitely more importance than the Guermantes and all the kings of the earth put together. I do not know whether he had formulated the doctrine that she was of a superior quality to anyone else, but I do know that he considered, took trouble only about what affected her. Through her and for her he was capable of suffering, of being happy, perhaps of doing murder. There was really nothing that interested, that could excite him except what his mistress wished, was going to do, what was going on, discernible at most in fleeting changes of expression, in the narrow expanse of her face and behind her privileged brow. So nice-minded in all else, he looked forward to the prospect of a brilliant marriage, solely in order to be able to continue to maintain her, to keep her always. If one had asked oneself what was the value that he set on her, I doubt whether one could ever have imagined a figure high enough. If he did not marry her, it was because a practical instinct warned him that as soon as she had nothing more to expect from him she would leave him, or would at least live as she chose, and that he must retain his hold on her by keeping her in suspense from day to day. For he admitted the possibility that she did not love him. No doubt the general affection called love must have forced him—as it forces all men—to believe at times that she did. But in his heart of hearts he felt that this love which she felt for him did not exhaust the possibility of her remaining with him only on account of his money, and that on the day when she had nothing more to expect from him she would make haste (the dupe of her friends and their literary theories, and loving him all the time, really—he thought) to leave him. "If she is nice to me to-day," he confided to me, "I am going to give her something that she'll like. It's a necklace she saw at Boucheron's. It's rather too much for me just at present—thirty thousand francs. But, poor puss, she gets so little pleasure out of life. She will be jolly pleased with it, I know. She mentioned it to me and told me she knew somebody who would perhaps give it to her. I don't believe that is true, really, but I wasn't taking any risks, so I've arranged with Boucheron, who is our family jeweller, to keep it for me. I am glad to think that you're going to meet her; she's nothing so very wonderful to look at, you know," (I could see that he thought just the opposite and had said this only so as to make me, when I did see her, admire her all the more) "what she has got is a marvellous judgment; she'll perhaps be afraid to talk much before you, but, by Jove! the things she'll say to me about you afterwards, you know she says things one can go on thinking about for hours; there's really something about her that's quite Pythian."

On our way to her house we passed by a row of little gardens, and I was obliged to stop, for they were all aflower with pear and cherry blossoms; as empty, no doubt, and lifeless only yesterday as a house that no tenant has taken, they were suddenly peopled and adorned by these newcomers, arrived during the night, whose lovely white garments we could see through the railings along the garden paths.

"Listen; I can see you'd rather stop and look at that stuff, and grow poetical about it," said Robert, "so just wait for me here, will you; my friend's house is quite close, I will go and fetch her."

While I waited I strolled up and down the road, past these modest gardens. If I raised my head I could see, now and then, girls sitting in the windows, but outside, in the open air, and at the height of a half-landing, here and there, light and pliant, in their fresh pink gowns, hanging among the leaves, young lilac-clusters were letting themselves be swung by the breeze without heeding the passer-by who was turning his eyes towards their green mansions. I recognised in them the platoons in violet uniform posted at the entrance to M. Swann's park, past the little white fence, in the warm afternoons of spring, like an enchanting rustic tapestry. I took a path which led me into a meadow. A cold wind blew keenly along it, as at Combray, but from the midst of the rich, moist, country soil, which might have been on the bank of the Vivonne, there had nevertheless arisen, punctual at the trysting place like all its band of brothers, a great white pear tree which waved smilingly in the sun's face, like a curtain of light materialised and made palpable, its flowers shaken by the breeze but polished and frosted with silver by the sun's rays.

Suddenly Saint-Loup appeared, accompanied by his mistress, and then, in this woman who was for him all the love, every possible delight in life, whose personality, mysteriously enshrined in a body as in a Tabernacle, was the object that still occupied incessantly the toiling imagination of my friend, whom he felt that he would never really know, as to whom he was perpetually asking himself what could be her secret self, behind the veil of eyes and flesh, in this woman I recognised at once 'Rachel when from the Lord,' her who, but a few years since—women change their position so rapidly in that world, when they do change—used to say to the procuress: "To-morrow evening, then, if you want me for anyone, you will send round, won't you?"

And when they had 'come round' for her, and she found herself alone in the room with the 'anyone,' she had known so well what was required of her that after locking the door, as a prudent woman's precaution or a ritual gesture, she would begin to take off all her things, as one does before the doctor who is going to sound one's chest, never stopping in the process unless the 'some one,' not caring for nudity, told her that she might keep on her shift, as specialists do sometimes who, having an extremely fine ear and being afraid of their patient's catching a chill, are satisfied with listening to his breathing and the beating of his heart through his shirt. On this woman whose whole life, all her thoughts, all her past, all the men who at one time or another had had her were to me so utterly unimportant that if she had begun to tell me about them I should have listened to her only out of politeness, and should barely have heard what she said, I felt that the anxiety, the torment, the love of Saint-Loup had been concentrated in such a way as to make—out of what was for me a mechanical toy, nothing more—the cause of endless suffering, the very object and reward of existence. Seeing these two elements separately (because I had known 'Rachel when from the Lord' in a house of ill fame), I realised that many women for the sake of whom men live, suffer, take their lives, may be in themselves or for other people what Rachel was for me. The idea that any one could be tormented by curiosity with regard to her life stupefied me. I could have told Robert of any number of her unchastities, which seemed to me the most uninteresting things in the world. And how they would have pained him! And what had he not given to learn them, without avail!

I realised also then all that the human imagination can put behind a little scrap of face, such as this girl's face was, if it is the imagination that was the first to know it; and conversely into what wretched elements, crudely material and utterly without value, might be decomposed what had been the inspiration of countless dreams if, on the contrary, it should be so to speak controverted by the slightest actual acquaintance. I saw that what had appeared to me to be not worth twenty francs when it had been offered to me for twenty francs in the house of ill fame, where it was then for me simply a woman desirous of earning twenty francs, might be worth more than a million, more than one's family, more than all the most coveted positions in life if one had begun by imagining her to embody a strange creature, interesting to know, difficult to seize and to hold. No doubt it was the same thin and narrow face that we saw, Robert and I. But we had arrived at it by two opposite ways, between which there was no communication, and we should never both see it from the same side. That face, with its stares, its smiles, the movements of its lips, I had known from outside as being simply that of a woman of the sort who for twenty francs would do anything that I asked. And so her stares, her smiles, the movements of her lips had seemed to me significant merely of the general actions of a class without any distinctive quality. And beneath them I should not have had the curiosity to look for a person. But what to me had in a sense been offered at the start, that consenting face, had been for Robert an ultimate goal towards which he had made his way through endless hopes and doubts, suspicions, dreams. He gave more than a million francs in order to have for himself, in order that there might not be offered to others what had been offered to me, as to all and sundry, for a score. That he too should not have enjoyed it at the lower price may have been due to the chance of a moment, the instant in which she who seemed ready to yield herself makes off, having perhaps an assignation elsewhere, some reason which makes her more difficult of access that day. Should the man be a sentimentalist, then, even if she has not observed it, but infinitely more if she has, the direst game begins. Unable to swallow his disappointment, to make himself forget about the woman, he starts afresh in pursuit, she flies him, until a mere smile for which he no longer ventured to hope is bought at a thousand times what should have been the price of the last, the most intimate favours. It happens even at times in such a case, when one has been led by a mixture of simplicity in one's judgment and cowardice in the face of suffering to commit the crowning folly of making an inaccessible idol of a girl, that these last favours, or even the first kiss one is fated never to obtain, one no longer even ventures to ask for them for fear of destroying one's chances of Platonic love. And it is then a bitter anguish to leave the world without having ever known what were the embraces of the woman one has most passionately loved. As for Rachel's favours, however, Saint-Loup had by mere accident succeeded in winning them all. Certainly if he had now learned that they had been offered to all the world for a louis, he would have suffered, of course, acutely, but would still have given a million francs for the right to keep them, for nothing that he might have learned could have made him emerge—since that is beyond human control and can be brought to pass only in spite of it by the action of some great natural law—from the path he was treading, from which that face could appear to him only through the web of the dreams that he had already spun. The immobility of that thin face, like that of a sheet of paper subjected to the colossal pressure of two atmospheres, seemed to me to be being maintained by two infinities which abutted on her without meeting, for she held them apart. And indeed, when Robert and I were both looking at her we did not both see her from the same side of the mystery.

It was not 'Rachel when from the Lord'—who seemed to me a small matter—it was the power of the human imagination, the illusion on which were based the pains of love; these I felt to be vast. Robert noticed that I appeared moved. I turned my eyes to the pear and cherry trees of the garden opposite, so that he might think that it was their beauty that had touched me. And it did touch me in somewhat the same way; it also brought close to me things of the kind which we not only see with our eyes but feel also in our hearts. These trees that I had seen in the garden, likening them in my mind to strange deities, had not my mistake been like the Magdalene's when, in another garden, she saw a human form and 'thought it was the gardener.' Treasurers of our memories of the age of gold, keepers of the promise that reality is not what we suppose, that the splendour of poetry, the wonderful radiance of innocence may shine in it and may be the recompense which we strive to earn, these great white creatures, bowed in a marvellous fashion above the shade propitious for rest, for angling or for reading, were they not rather angels? I exchanged a few words with Saint-Loup's mistress. We cut across the village. Its houses were sordid. But by each of the most wretched, of those that looked as though they had been scorched and branded by a rain of brimstone, a mysterious traveller, halting for a day in the accursed city, a resplendent angel stood erect, extending broadly over it the dazzling protection of the wings of flowering innocence: it was a pear tree. Saint-Loup drew me a little way in front to explain.

"I should have liked it if you and I could have been alone together, in fact I would much rather have had luncheon just with you, and stayed with you until it was time to go to my aunt's. But this poor girl of mine here, it is such a pleasure to her, and she is so decent to me, don't you know, I hadn't the heart to refuse her. You'll like her, however, she's literary, you know, a most sensitive nature, and besides it's such a pleasure to be with her in a restaurant, she is so charming, so simple, always delighted with everything."

I fancy nevertheless that, on this same morning, and then probably for the first and last time, Robert did detach himself for a moment from the woman whom out of successive layers of affection he had gradually created, and beheld suddenly at some distance from himself another Rachel, outwardly the double of his but entirely different, who was nothing more or less than a little light of love. We had left the blossoming orchard and were making for the train which was to take us to Paris when, at the station, Rachel, who was walking by herself, was recognised and accosted by a pair of common little 'tarts' like herself, who first of all, thinking that she was alone, called out: "Hello, Rachel, you come with us; Lucienne and Germaine are in the train, and there's room for one more. Come on. We're all going to the rink," and were just going to introduce to her two counter-jumpers, their lovers, who were escorting them, when, noticing that she seemed a little uneasy, they looked up and beyond her, caught sight of us, and with apologies bade her a good-bye to which she responded in a somewhat embarrassed, but still friendly tone. They were two poor little 'tarts' with collars of sham otter skin, looking more or less as Rachel must have looked when Saint-Loup first met her. He did not know them, or their names even, and seeing that they appeared to be extremely intimate with his mistress he could not help wondering whether she too might not once have had, had not still perhaps her place in a life of which he had never dreamed, utterly different from the life she led with him, a life in which one had women for a louis apiece, whereas he was giving more than a hundred thousand francs a year to Rachel. He caught only a fleeting glimpse of that life, but saw also in the thick of it a Rachel other than her whom he knew, a Rachel like the two little 'tarts' in the train, a twenty-franc Rachel. In short, Rachel had for the moment duplicated herself in his eyes, he had seen, at some distance from his own Rachel, the little 'tart' Rachel, the real Rachel, assuming that Rachel the 'tart' was more real than the other. It may then have occurred to Robert that from the hell in which he was living, with the prospect of a rich marriage, of the sale of his name, to enable him to go on giving Rachel a hundred thousand francs every year, he might easily perhaps have escaped, and have enjoyed the favours of his mistress, as the two counter-jumpers enjoyed those of their girls, for next to nothing. But how was it to be done? She had done nothing to forfeit his regard. Less generously rewarded she would be less kind to him, would stop saying and writing the things that so deeply moved him, things which he would quote, with a touch of ostentation, to his friends, taking care to point out how nice it was of her to say them, but omitting to mention that he was maintaining her in the most lavish fashion, or even that he ever gave her anything at all, that these inscriptions on photographs, or greetings at the end of telegrams were but the conversion into the most exiguous, the most precious of currencies of a hundred thousand francs. If he took care not to admit that these rare kindnesses on Rachel's part were handsomely paid for by himself, it would be wrong to say—and yet, by a crude piece of reasoning, we do say it, absurdly, of every lover who pays in cash for his pleasure, and of a great many husbands—that this was from self-esteem or vanity. Saint-Loup had enough sense to perceive that all the pleasures which appeal to vanity he could have found easily and without cost to himself in society, on the strength of his historic name and handsome face, and that his connexion with Rachel had rather, if anything, tended to ostracise him, led to his being less sought after. No; this self-esteem which seeks to appear to be receiving gratuitously the outward signs of the affection of her whom one loves is simply a consequence of love, the need to figure in one's own eyes and in other people's as loved in return by the person whom one loves so well. Rachel rejoined us, leaving the two 'tarts' to get into their compartment; but, no less than their sham otter skins and the self-conscious appearance of their young men, the names Lucienne and Germaine kept the new Rachel alive for a moment longer. For a moment Robert imagined a Place Pigalle existence with unknown associates, sordid love affairs, afternoons spent in simple amusements, excursions or pleasure-parties, in that Paris in which the sunny brightness of the streets from the Boulevard de Clichy onwards did not seem the same as the solar radiance in which he himself strolled with his mistress, but must be something different, for love, and suffering which is one with love, have, like intoxication, the power to alter for us inanimate things. It was almost an unknown Paris in the heart of Paris itself that he suspected, his connexion appeared to him like the exploration of a strange form of life, for if when with him Rachel was somewhat similar to himself, it was nevertheless a part of her real life that she lived with him, indeed the most precious part, in view of his reckless expenditure on her, the part that made her so greatly envied by her friends and would enable her one day to retire to the country or to establish herself in the leading theatres, when she had made her pile. Robert longed to ask her who Lucienne and Germaine were, what they would have said to her if she had joined them in their compartment, how they would all have spent a day which would have perhaps ended, as a supreme diversion, after the pleasures of the rink, at the Olympia Tavern, if Robert and I had not been there. For a moment the purlieus of the Olympia, which until then had seemed to him merely deadly dull, aroused curiosity in him and pain, and the sunshine of this spring day beating upon the Rue Caumartin where, possibly, if she had not known Robert, Rachel might have gone in the course of the evening and have earned a louis, filled him with a vague longing. But what use was it to ply Rachel with questions when he already knew that her answer would be merely silence, or a lie, or something extremely painful for him to hear, which would yet explain nothing. The porters were shutting the doors; we jumped into a first-class carriage; Rachel's magnificent pearls reminded Robert that she was a woman of great price, he caressed her, restored her to her place in his heart where he could contemplate her, internalised, as he had always done hitherto—save during this brief instant in which he had seen her in the Place Pigalle of an impressionist painter—and the train began to move.

It was, by the way, quite true that she was 'literary.' She never stopped talking to me about books, new art and Tolstoyism except to rebuke Saint-Loup for drinking so much wine:

"Ah! If you could live with me for a year, we'd see a fine change. I should keep you on water and you'd be ever so much better."

"Right you are. Let's begin now."

"But you know quite well I have to work all day!" For she took her art very seriously. "Besides, what would your people say?"

And she began to abuse his family to me in terms which for that matter seemed to me highly reasonable, and with which Saint-Loup, while disobeying her orders in the matter of champagne, entirely concurred. I, who was so much afraid of the effect of wine on him, and felt the good influence of his mistress, was quite prepared to advise him to let his family go hang. Tears sprang to the young woman's eyes; I had been rash enough to refer to Dreyfus.

"The poor martyr!" she almost sobbed; "it will be the death of him in that dreadful place."

"Don't upset yourself, Zézette, he will come back, he will be acquitted all right, they will admit they've made a mistake."

"But long before then he'll be dead! Oh, well at any rate his children will bear a stainless name. But just think of the agony he must be going through; that's what makes my heart bleed. And would you believe that Robert's mother, a pious woman, says that he ought to be left on the Devil's Isle, even if he is innocent; isn't it appalling?"

"Yes, it's absolutely true, she does say that," Robert assured me. "She's my mother, I've no fault to find with her, but it's quite clear she hasn't got a sensitive nature, like Zézette."

As a matter of fact these luncheons which were said to be 'such a pleasure' always ended in trouble. For as soon as Saint-Loup found himself in a public place with his mistress, he would imagine that she was looking at every other man in the room, and his brow would darken; she would remark his ill-humour, which she may have thought it amusing to encourage, or, as was more probable, by a foolish piece of conceit preferred, feeling wounded by his tone, not to appear to be seeking to disarm; and would make a show of being unable to take her eyes off some man or other, not that this was always a mere pretence. In fact, the gentleman who, in theatre or café, happened to sit next to them, or, to go no farther, the driver of the cab they had engaged need only have something attractive about him, no matter what, and Robert, his perception quickened by jealousy, would have noticed it before his mistress; he would see in him immediately one of those foul creatures whom he had denounced to me at

Balbec, who corrupted and dishonoured women for their own amusement, would beg his mistress to take her eyes off the man, thereby drawing her attention to him. And sometimes she found that Robert had shewn such good judgment in his suspicion that after a little she even left off teasing him in order that he might calm down and consent to go off by himself on some errand which would give her time to begin conversation with the stranger, often to make an assignation, sometimes even to bring matters quickly to a head. I could see as soon as we entered the restaurant that Robert was looking troubled. The fact of the matter was that he had at once remarked, what had escaped our notice at Balbec, namely that, standing among his coarser colleagues, Aimé, with a modest brilliance, emitted, quite unconsciously of course, that air of romance which emanates until a certain period in life from fine hair and a Grecian nose, features thanks to which he was distinguishable among the crowd of waiters. The others, almost all of them well on in years, presented a series of types, extraordinarily ugly and criminal, of hypocritical priests, sanctimonious confessors, more numerously of comic actors of the old school, whose sugar-loaf foreheads are scarcely to be seen nowadays outside the collections of portraits that hang in the humbly historic green-rooms of little, out of date theatres, where they are represented in the parts of servants or high priests, though this restaurant seemed, thanks to a selective method of recruiting and perhaps to some system of hereditary nomination, to have preserved their solemn type in a sort of College of Augurs. As ill luck would have it, Aimé having recognised us, it was he who came to take our order, while the procession of operatic high priests swept past us to other tables. Aimé inquired after my grandmother's health; I asked for news of his wife and children. He gave it with emotion, being a family man. He had an intelligent, vigorous, but respectful air. Robert's mistress began to gaze at him with a strange attentiveness. But Aimé's sunken eyes, in which a slight short-sightedness gave one the impression of veiled depths, shewed no sign of consciousness in his still face. In the provincial hotel in which he had served for many years before coming to Balbec, the charming sketch, now a trifle discoloured and faded, which was his face, and which, for all those years, like some engraved portrait of Prince Eugène, had been visible always at the same place, at the far end of a dining-room that was almost always empty, could not have attracted any very curious gaze. He had thus for long remained, doubtless for want of sympathetic admirers, in ignorance of the artistic value of his face, and but little inclined for that matter to draw attention to it, for he was temperamentally cold. At the most, some passing Parisian, stopping for some reason in the town, had raised her eyes to his, had asked him perhaps to bring something to her in her room before she left for the station, and in the pellucid, monotonous, deep void of this existence of a faithful husband and servant in a country town had hidden the secret of a caprice without sequel which no one would ever bring to light. And yet Aimé must have been conscious of the insistent emphasis with which the eyes of the young actress were fastened upon him now. Anyhow, it did not escape Robert beneath whose skin I saw gathering a flush, not vivid like that which burned his cheeks when he felt any sudden emotion, but faint, diffused.

"Anything specially interesting about that waiter, Zézette?" he inquired, after sharply dismissing Aimé. "One would think you were studying the part."

"There you are, beginning again; I knew it was coming."

"Beginning what again, my dear girl? I may have been mistaken; I haven't said anything, I'm sure. But I have at least the right to warn you against the fellow, seeing that I knew him at Balbec (otherwise I shouldn't give a damn), and a bigger scoundrel doesn't walk the face of the earth."

She seemed anxious to pacify Robert and began to engage me in a literary conversation in which he joined. I found that it did not bore me to talk to her, for she had a thorough knowledge of the books that I most admired, and her opinion of them agreed more or less with my own; but as I had heard Mme. de Villeparisis declare that she had no talent, I attached but little importance to this evidence of culture. She discoursed wittily on all manner of topics, and would have been genuinely entertaining had she not affected to an irritating extent the jargon of the sets and studios. She applied this, moreover, to everything under the sun; for instance, having acquired the habit of saying of a picture, if it were impressionist, or an opera, if Wagnerian, "Ah! That is *good*!" one day when a young man had kissed her on the ear, and, touched by her pretence of being thrilled, had affected modesty, she said: "Yes, as a sensation I call it distinctly *good*." But what more surprised me was that the expressions peculiar to Robert (which, moreover, had come to him, perhaps, from literary men whom she knew) were used by her to him and by him to her as though they had been a necessary form of speech, and without any conception of the pointlessness of an originality that is universal.

In eating, she managed her hands so clumsily that one assumed that she must appear extremely awkward upon the stage. She recovered her dexterity only when making love, with that touching prescience latent in women who love the male body so intensely that they immediately guess what will give most pleasure to that body, which is yet so different from their own.

I ceased to take part in the conversation when it turned upon the theatre, for on that topic Rachel was too malicious for my liking. She did, it was true, take up in a tone of commiseration—against Saint-Loup, which proved that he was accustomed to hearing Rachel attack her—the defence of Berma, saying: "Oh, no, she's a wonderful person, really. Of course, the things she does no longer appeal to us, they don't correspond quite to what we are looking for, but one must think of her at the period to which she belongs; we owe her a great deal. She has done good work, you know. And besides she's such a fine woman, she has such a good heart; naturally she doesn't care about the things that interest us, but she has had in her time, with a rather impressive face, a charming quality of mind." (Our fingers, by the way, do not play the same accompaniment to all our aesthetic judgments. If it is a picture that is under discussion, to shew that it is a fine work with plenty of paint, it is enough to stick out one's thumb. But the 'charming quality of mind' is more exacting. It requires two fingers, or rather two fingernails, as though one were trying to flick off a particle of dust.) But, with this single exception, Saint-Loup's mistress referred to the best-known actresses in a tone of ironical superiority which annoyed me because I believed—quite mistakenly, as it happened—that it was she who was inferior to them. She was clearly aware that I must regard her as an indifferent actress, and on the other hand have a great regard for those she despised. But she shewed no resentment, because there is in all great talent while it is still, as hers was then, unrecognised, however sure it may be of itself, a vein of humility, and because we make the consideration that we expect from others proportionate not to our latent powers but to the position to which we have attained. (I was, an hour or so later, at the theatre, to see Saint-Loup's mistress shew great deference towards those very artists against whom she was now bringing so harsh a judgment to bear.) And so, in however little doubt my silence may have left her, she insisted nevertheless on our dining together that evening, assuring me that never had anyone's conversation delighted her so much as mine. If we were not yet in the theatre, to which we were to go after luncheon, we had the sense of being in a green-room hung with portraits of old members of the company, so markedly were the waiters' faces those which, one thought, had perished with a whole generation of obscure actors of the Palais-Royal; they had a look, also, of Academicians; stopping before a side table one of them was examining a dish of pears with the expression of detached curiosity that M. de Jussieu might have worn. Others, on either side of him, were casting about the room that gaze instinct with curiosity and coldness which Members of the Institute, who have arrived early, throw at the public, while they exchange a few murmured words which one fails to catch. They were faces well known to all the regular guests. One of them, however, was being pointed out, a newcomer with distended nostrils and a smug upper lip, who looked like a cleric; he was entering upon his duties there for the first time, and everyone gazed with interest at this newly elected candidate. But presently, perhaps to drive Robert away so that she might be alone with Aimé, Rachel began to make eyes at a young student, who was feeding with another man at a neighbouring table.

"Zézette, let me beg you not to look at that young man like that," said Saint-Loup, on whose face the hesitating flush of a moment ago had been gathered now into a scarlet tide which dilated and darkened his swollen features, "if you must make a scene here, I shall simply finish eating by myself and join you at the theatre afterwards."

At this point a messenger came up to tell Aimé that he was wanted to speak to a gentleman in a carriage outside. Saint-Loup, ever uneasy, and afraid now that it might be some message of an amorous nature that was to be conveyed to his mistress, looked out of the window and saw there, sitting up in his brougham, his hands tightly buttoned in white gloves with black seams, a flower in his buttonhole, M. de Charlus.

"There; you see!" he said to me in a low voice, "my family hunt me down even here. Will you, please—I can't very well do it myself, but you can, as you know the head waiter so well and he's certain to give us away—

ask him not to go to the carriage. He can always send some other waiter who doesn't know me. I know my uncle; if they tell him that I'm not known here, he'll never come inside to look for me, he loathes this sort of place. Really, it's pretty disgusting that an old petticoat-chaser like him, who is still at it, too, should be perpetually lecturing me and coming to spy on me!"

Aimé on receiving my instructions sent one of his underlings to explain that he was busy and could not come out at the moment, and (should the gentleman ask for the Marquis de Saint-Loup) that they did not know any such person. But Saint-Loup's mistress, who had failed to catch our whispered conversation and thought that it was still about the young man at whom Robert had been finding fault with her for making eyes, broke out in a torrent of rage.

"Oh, indeed! So it's the young man over there, now, is it? Thank you for telling me; it's a real pleasure to have this sort of thing with one's meals! Don't listen to him, please; he's rather cross to-day, and, you know," she went on, turning to me, "he just says it because he thinks it smart, that it's the gentlemanly thing to appear jealous always."

And she began with feet and fingers to shew signs of nervous irritation.

"But, Zézette, it is I who find it unpleasant. You are making us all ridiculous before that gentleman, who will begin to imagine you're making overtures to him, and an impossible bounder he looks, too."

"Oh, no, I think he's charming; for one thing, he's got the most adorable eyes, and a way of looking at women—you can feel he must love them."

"You can at least keep quiet until I've left the room, if you have lost your senses," cried Robert. "Waiter, my things."

I did not know whether I was expected to follow him.

"No, I want to be alone," he told me in the same tone in which he had just been addressing his mistress, and as if he were quite furious with me. His anger was like a single musical phrase to which in an opera several lines are sung which are entirely different from one another, if one studies the words, in meaning and character, but which the music assimilates by a common sentiment. When Robert had gone, his mistress called Aimé and asked him various questions. She then wanted to know what I thought of him.

"An amusing expression, hasn't he? Do you know what I should like; it would be to know what he really thinks about things, to have him wait on me often, to take him travelling. But that would be all. If we were expected to love all the people who attract us, life would be pretty ghastly, wouldn't it? It's silly of Robert to get ideas like that. All that sort of thing, it's only just what comes into my head, that's all; Robert has nothing to worry about." She was still gazing at Aimé. "Do look, what dark eyes he has. I should love to know what there is behind them."

Presently came a message that Robert was waiting for her in a private room, to which he had gone to finish his luncheon, by another door, without having to pass through the restaurant again. I thus found myself alone, until I too was summoned by Robert. I found his mistress stretched out on a sofa laughing under the kisses and caresses that he was showering on her. They were drinking champagne. "Hallo, you!" she cried to him, having recently picked up this formula which seemed to her the last word in playfulness and wit. I had fed badly, I was extremely uncomfortable, and albeit Legrandin's words had had no effect on me I was sorry to think that I was beginning in a back room of a restaurant and should be finishing in the wings of a theatre this first afternoon of spring. Looking first at the time to see that she was not making herself late, she offered me a glass of champagne, handed me one of her Turkish cigarettes and unpinned a rose for me from her bodice. Whereupon I said to myself: "I have nothing much to regret, after all; these hours spent in this young woman's company are not wasted, since I have had from her, charming gifts which could not be bought too dear, a rose, a scented cigarette and a glass of champagne." I told myself this because I felt that it endowed with an aesthetic character and thereby justified, saved these hours of boredom. I ought perhaps to have reflected that the very need which I felt of a reason that would console me for my boredom was sufficient to prove that I was experiencing no aesthetic sensation. As for Robert and his mistress, they appeared to have no recollection of the quarrel which had been raging between them a few minutes earlier, or of my having been a witness to it. They made no allusion to it, sought no excuse for it any more than for the contrast with it which their present conduct formed. By dint of drinking champagne with them, I began to feel a little of the intoxication that used to come over me at Rivebelle, though probably not quite the same. Not only every kind of intoxication, from that which the sun or travelling gives us to that which we get from exhaustion or wine, but every degree of intoxication—and each must have a different figure, like the numbers of fathoms on a chart—lays bare in us exactly at the depth to which it reaches a different kind of man. The room which Saint-Loup had taken was small, but the mirror which was its sole ornament was of such a kind that it seemed to reflect thirty others in an endless vista; and the electric bulb placed at the top of the frame must at night, when the light was on, followed by the procession of thirty flashes similar to its own, give to the drinker, even when alone, the idea that the surrounding space was multiplying itself simultaneously with his sensations heightened by intoxication, and that, shut up by himself in this little cell, he was reigning nevertheless over something far more extensive in its indefinite luminous curve than a passage in the Jardin de Paris. Being then myself at this moment the said drinker, suddenly, looking for him in the glass, I caught sight of him, hideous, a stranger, who was staring at me. The joy of intoxication was stronger than my disgust; from gaiety or bravado I smiled at him, and simultaneously he smiled back at me. And I felt myself so much under the ephemeral and potent sway of the minute in which our sensations are so strong, that I am not sure whether my sole regret was not at the thought that this hideous self of whom I had just caught sight in the glass was perhaps there for the last time on earth, and that I should never meet the stranger again in the whole course of my life.

Robert was annoyed only because I was not being more brilliant before his mistress.

"What about that fellow you met this morning, who combines snobbery with astronomy; tell her about him, I've forgotten the story," and he watched her furtively.

"But, my dear boy, there's nothing more than what you've just said."

"What a bore you are. Then tell her about Françoise in the Champs-Elysées. She'll enjoy that."

"Oh, do! Bobby is always talking about Françoise." And taking Saint-Loup by the chin, she repeated, for want of anything more original, drawing the said chin nearer to the light: "Hallo, you!"

Since actors had ceased to be for me exclusively the depositaries, in their diction and playing, of an artistic truth, they had begun to interest me in themselves; I amused myself, pretending that what I saw before me were the characters in some old humorous novel, by watching, struck by the fresh face of the young man who had just come into the stalls, the heroine listen distractedly to the declaration of love which the juvenile lead in the piece was addressing to her, while he, through the fiery torrent of his impassioned speech, still kept a burning gaze fixed on an old lady seated in a stage box, whose magnificent pearls had caught his eye; and thus, thanks especially to the information that Saint-Loup gave me as to the private lives of the players, I saw another drama, mute but expressive, enacted beneath the words of the spoken drama which in itself, although of no merit, interested me also; for I could feel in it that there were budding and opening for an hour in the glare of the footlights, created out of the agglutination on the face of an actor of another face of grease paint and pasteboard, on his own human soul the words of a part.

These ephemeral vivid personalities which the characters are in a play that is entertaining also, whom one loves, admires, pities, whom one would like to see again after one has left the theatre, but who by that time are already disintegrated into a comedian who is no longer in the position which he occupied in the play, a text which no longer shews one the comedian's face, a coloured powder which a handkerchief wipes off, who have returned in short to elements that contain nothing of them, since their dissolution, effected so soon after the end of the show, make us—like the dissolution of a dear friend—begin to doubt the reality of our ego and meditate on the mystery of death.

One number in the programme I found extremely trying. A young woman whom Rachel and some of her friends disliked was, with a set of old songs, to make a first appearance on which she had based all her hopes for the future of herself and her family. This young woman was blessed with unduly, almost grotesquely prominent hips and a pretty but too slight voice, weakened still farther by her excitement and in marked contrast to her muscular development. Rachel had posted among the audience a certain number of friends, male and female, whose business it was by their sarcastic comments to put the novice, who was known to be timid, out of countenance, to make her lose her head so that her turn should prove a complete failure, after which the manager would refuse to give her a contract. At the first notes uttered by the wretched woman, several of the male audience, recruited for that purpose, began pointing to her backward profile with jocular comments, several of the women, also in the plot, laughed out loud, each flute-like note from the stage increased the deliberate hilarity, which grew to a public scandal. The unhappy woman, sweating with anguish through her grease-paint, tried for a little longer to hold out, then stopped and looked round the audience with an appealing gaze of misery and anger which succeeded only in increasing the uproar. The instinct to imitate others, the desire to shew their own wit and daring added to the party several pretty actresses who had not been forewarned but now threw at the others glances charged with malicious connivance, and sat convulsed with laughter which rang out in such violent peals that at the end of the second song, although there were still five more on the programme, the stage manager rang down the curtain. I tried to make myself pay no more heed to the incident than I had paid to my grandmother's sufferings when my great-aunt, to tease her, used to give my grandfather brandy, the idea of deliberate wickedness being too painful for me to bear. And yet, just as our pity for misfortune is perhaps not very exact since in our imagination we recreate a whole world of grief by which the unfortunate who has to struggle against it has no time to think of being moved to self-pity, so wickedness has probably not in the mind of the wicked man that pure and voluptuous cruelty which it so pains us to imagine. Hatred inspires him, anger gives him an ardour, an activity in which there is no great joy; he must be a sadist to extract any pleasure from it; ordinarily, the wicked man supposes himself to be punishing the wickedness of his victim; Rachel imagined certainly that the actress whom she was making suffer was far from being of interest to any one, and that anyhow, in having her hissed off the stage, she was herself avenging an outrage on good taste and teaching an unworthy comrade a lesson. Nevertheless, I preferred not to speak of this incident since I had had neither the courage nor the power to prevent it, and it would have been too painful for me, by saying any good of their victim, to approximate to a gratification of the lust for cruelty the sentiments which animated the tormentors who had strangled this career in its infancy.

But the opening scene of this afternoon's performance interested me in quite another way. It made me realise in part the nature of the illusion of which Saint-Loup was a victim with regard to Rachel, and which had set a gulf between the images that he and I respectively had in mind of his mistress, when we beheld her that morning among the blossoming pear trees. Rachel was playing a part which involved barely more than her walking on in the little play. But seen thus, she was another woman. She had one of those faces to which distance—and not necessarily that between stalls and stage, the world being in this respect only a larger theatre—gives form and outline and which, seen close at hand, dissolve back into dust. Standing beside her one saw only a nebula, a milky way of freckles, of tiny spots, nothing more. At a proper distance, all this ceased to be visible and, from cheeks that withdrew, were reabsorbed into her face, rose like a crescent moon a nose so fine, so pure that one would have liked to be the object of Rachel's attention, to see her again as often as one chose, to keep her close to one, provided that one had not already seen her differently and at close range. This was not my case but it had been Saint-Loup's when he first saw her on the stage. Then he had asked himself how he might approach her, how come to know her, there had opened in him a whole fairy realm—that in which she lived—from which emanated an exquisite radiance but into which he might not penetrate. He had left the theatre telling himself that it would be madness to write to her, that she would not answer his letter, quite prepared to give his fortune and his name for the creature who was living in him in a world so vastly superior to those too familiar realities, a world made beautiful by desire and dreams of happiness, when at the back of the theatre, a little old building which had itself the air of being a piece of scenery, from the stage door he saw debouch the gay and daintily hatted band of actresses who had just been playing. Young men who knew them were waiting for them outside. The number of pawns on the human chessboard being less than the number of combinations that they are capable of forming, in a theatre from which are absent all the people we know and might have expected to find, there turns up one whom we never imagined that we should see again and who appears so opportunely that the coincidence seems to us providential, although no doubt some other coincidence would have occurred in its stead had we been not in that place but in some other, where other desires would have been aroused and we should have met some other old acquaintance to help us to satisfy them. The golden portals of the world of dreams had closed again upon Rachel before Saint-Loup saw her emerge from the theatre, so that the freckles and spots were of little importance. They vexed him nevertheless, especially as, being no longer alone, he had not now the same opportunity to dream as in the theatre. But she, for all that he could no longer see her, continued to dictate his actions, like those stars which govern us by their attraction even during the hours in which they are not visible to our eyes. And so his desire for the actress with the fine features which had no place now even in Robert's memory had the result that, dashing towards the old friend whom chance had brought to the spot, he insisted upon an introduction to the person with no features and with freckles, since she was the same person, telling himself that later on he would take care to find out which of the two this same person really was. She was in a hurry, she did not on this occasion say a single word to Saint-Loup, and it was only some days later that he finally contrived, by inducing her to leave her companions, to escort her home. He loved her already. The need for dreams, the desire to be made happy by her of whom one has dreamed, bring it about that not much time is required before one entrusts all one's chances of happiness to her who a few days since was but a fortuitous apparition, unknown, unmeaning, upon the boards of the theatre.

When, the curtain having fallen, we moved on to the stage, alarmed at finding myself there for the first time, I felt the need to begin a spirited conversation with Saint-Loup. In this way my attitude, as I did not know what one ought to adopt in a setting that was strange to me, would be entirely dominated by our talk, and people would think that I was so absorbed in it, so unobservant of my surroundings, that it was quite natural that I should not shew the facial expressions proper to a place in which, to judge by what I appeared to be saying, I was barely conscious of standing; and seizing, to make a beginning, upon the first topic that came to my mind:

"You know," I said, "I did come to say good-bye to you the day I left Doncières; I've not had an opportunity to mention it. I waved to you in the street."

"Don't speak about it," he replied, "I was so sorry. I passed you just outside the barracks, but I couldn't stop because I was late already. I assure you, I felt quite wretched about it."

So he had recognised me! I saw again in my mind the wholly impersonal salute which he had given me, raising his hand to his cap, without a glance to indicate that he knew me, without a gesture to shew that he was sorry he could not stop. Evidently this fiction, which he had adopted at that moment, of not knowing me must have simplified matters for him greatly. But I was amazed to find that he had been able to compose himself to it so swiftly and without any instinctive movement to betray his original impression. I had already observed at Balbec that, side by side with that childlike sincerity of his face, the skin of which by its transparence rendered visible the sudden tide of certain emotions, his body had been admirably trained to perform a certain number of well-bred dissimulations, and that, like a consummate actor, he could, in his regimental and in his social life, play alternately quite different parts. In one of his parts he loved me tenderly, he acted towards me almost as if he had been my brother; my brother he had been, he was now again, but for a moment that day he had been another person who did not know me and who, holding the reins, his glass screwed to his eye, without a look or a smile had lifted his disengaged hand to the peak of his cap to give me correctly the military salute.

The stage scenery, still in its place, among which I was passing, seen thus at close range and without the advantage of any of those effects of lighting and distance on which the eminent artist whose brush had painted it had calculated, was a depressing sight, and Rachel, when I came near her, was subjected to a no less destructive force. The curves of her charming nose had stood out in perspective, between stalls and stage, like the relief of the scenery. It was no longer herself, I recognised her only thanks to her eyes, in which her identity had taken refuge. The form, the radiance of this young star, so brilliant a moment ago, had vanished. On the other hand—as though we came close to the moon and it ceased to present the appearance of a disk of rosy gold—on this face, so smooth a surface until now, I could distinguish only protuberances, discolourations, cavities. Despite the incoherence into which were resolved at close range not only the feminine features but the painted canvas, I was glad to be there to wander among the scenery, all that setting which at one time my love of nature had prompted me to dismiss as tedious and artificial until the description of it by Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister* had given it a sort of beauty in my eyes; and I had already observed with delight, in the thick of a crowd of journalists or men of fashion, friends of the actresses, who were greeting one another, talking, smoking, as though in a public thoroughfare, a young man in a black velvet cap and hortensia-coloured skirt, his cheeks chalked in red like a page from a Watteau album, who with his smiling lips, his eyes raised to the ceiling, as he sprang lightly into the air, seemed so entirely of another species than the rational folk in everyday clothes, in the midst of whom he was pursuing like a madman the course of his ecstatic dream, so alien to the preoccupations of their life, so anterior to the habits of their civilisation, so enfranchised from all the laws of nature, that it was as restful and as fresh a spectacle as watching a butterfly straying along a crowded street to follow with one's eyes, between the strips of canvas, the natural arabesques traced by his winged capricious painted oscillations. But at that moment Saint-Loup conceived the idea that his mistress was paying undue attention to this dancer, who was engaged now in practising for the last time the figure of fun with which he was going to take the stage, and his face darkened.

"You might look the other way," he warned her gloomily. "You know that none of those dancer-fellows is worth the rope they can at least fall off and break their necks, and they're the sort of people who go about afterwards boasting that you've taken notice of them. Besides, you know very well you've been told to go to your dressing-room and change. You'll be missing your call again."

A group of men—journalists—noticing the look of fury on Saint-Loup's face, came nearer, amused, to listen to what we were saying. And as the stage-hands had just set up some scenery on our other side we were forced into close contact with them.

"Oh, but I know him; he's a friend of mine," cried Saint-Loup's mistress, her eyes still fixed on the dancer. "Look how well made he is, do watch those little hands of his dancing away by themselves like his whole body!"

The dancer turned his head towards her, and his human person appeared beneath the sylph that he was endeavouring to be, the clear grey jelly of his eyes trembled and sparkled between eyelids stiff with paint, and a smile extended the corners of his mouth into cheeks plastered with rouge; then, to amuse the girl, like a singer who hums to oblige us the air of the song in which we have told her that we admired her singing, he began to repeat the movement of his hands, counterfeiting himself with the fineness of a parodist and the good humour of a child.

"Oh, that's too lovely, the way he copies himself," she cried, clapping her hands.

"I implore you, my dearest girl," Saint-Loup broke in, in a tone of utter misery, "do not make a scene here, I can't stand it; I swear, if you say another word I won't go with you to your room, I shall walk straight out; come, don't be so naughty. . . . You oughtn't to stand about in the cigar smoke like that, it'll make you ill," he went on, to me, with the solicitude he had shewn for me in our Balbec days.

"Oh! What a good thing it would be if you did go."

"I warn you, if I do I shan't come back."

"That's more than I should venture to hope."

"Listen; you know, I promised you the necklace if you behaved nicely to me, but the moment you treat me like this. . . ."

"Ah! Well, that doesn't surprise me in the least. You gave me your promise; I ought to have known you'd never keep it. You want the whole world to know you're made of money, but I'm not a money-grubber like you. You can keep your blasted necklace; I know some one else who'll give it to me."

"No one else can possibly give it to you; I've told Boucheron he's to keep it for me, and I have his promise not to let anyone else have it."

"There you are, trying to blackmail me, you've arranged everything, I see. That's what they mean by Marsantes, *Mater Semita*, it smells of the race," retorted Rachel quoting an etymology which was founded on a wild misinterpretation, for *Semita* means 'path' and not 'Semite,' but one which the Nationalists applied to Saint-Loup on account of the Dreyfusard views for which, so far as that went, he was indebted to the actress. She was less entitled than anyone to apply the word 'Jew' to Mme. de Marsantes, in whom the ethnologists of society could succeed in finding no trace of Judaism apart from her connexion with the Lévy-Mirepoix family. "But this isn't the last of it, I can tell you. An agreement like that isn't binding. You have acted treacherously towards me. Boucheron shall be told of it and he'll be paid twice as much for his necklace. You'll hear from me before long; don't you worry."

Robert was in the right a hundred times over. But circumstances are always so entangled that the man who is in the right a hundred times may have been once in the wrong. And I could not help recalling that unpleasant and yet quite innocent expression which he had used at Balbec: "In that way I keep a hold over her."

"You don't understand what I mean about the necklace. I made no formal promise: once you start doing everything you possibly can to make me leave you, it's only natural, surely, that I shouldn't give it to you; I fail to understand what treachery you can see in that, or what my ulterior motive is supposed to be. You can't seriously maintain that I brag about my money, I'm always telling you that I'm only a poor devil without a cent to my name. It's foolish of you take it in that way, my dear. What possible interest can I have in hurting you? You know very well that my one interest in life is yourself."

"Oh, yes, yes, please go on," she retorted ironically, with the sweeping gesture of a barber wielding his razor. And turning to watch the dancer:

"Isn't he too wonderful with his hands. A woman like me couldn't do the things he's doing now." She went closer to him and, pointing to Robert's furious face: "Look, he's hurt," she murmured, in the momentary elation of a sadic impulse to cruelty totally out of keeping with the genuine feelings of affection for Saint-Loup.

"Listen, for the last time, I swear to you it doesn't matter what you do—in a week you'll be giving anything to get me back—I shan't come; it's a clean cut, do you hear, it's irrevocable; you will be sorry one day, when it's too late."

Perhaps he was sincere in saying this, and the torture of leaving his mistress may have seemed to him less cruel than that of remaining with her in certain circumstances.

"But, my dear boy," he went on, to me, "you oughtn't to stand about here, I tell you, it will make you cough."

I pointed to the scenery which barred my way. He touched his hat and said to one of the journalists:

"Would you mind, sir, throwing away your cigar; the smoke is bad for my friend."

His mistress had not waited for him to accompany her; on her way to her dressing-room she turned round and:

"Do they do those tricks with women too, those nice little hands?" she flung to the dancer from the back of the stage, in an artificially melodious tone of girlish innocence. "You look just like one yourself, I'm sure I could have a wonderful time with you and a girl I know."

"There's no rule against smoking that I know of; if people aren't well, they have only to stay at home," said the journalist.

The dancer smiled mysteriously back at the actress.

"Oh! Do stop! You'll make me quite mad," she cried to him. "Then there will be trouble."

"In any case, sir, you are not very civil," observed Saint-Loup to the journalist, still with a courteous suavity, in the deliberate manner of a man judging retrospectively the rights and wrongs of an incident that is already closed.

At that moment I saw Saint-Loup raise his arm vertically above his head as if he had been making a signal to some one whom I could not see, or like the conductor of an orchestra, and indeed—without any greater transition than when, at a simple wave of the baton, in a symphony or a ballet, violent rhythms succeed a graceful andante—after the courteous words that he had just uttered he brought down his hand with a resounding smack upon the journalist's cheek.

Now that to the measured conversations of the diplomats, to the smiling arts of peace had succeeded the furious onthrust of war, since blows lead to blows, I should not have been surprised to see the combatants swimming in one another's blood. But what I could not understand (like people who feel that it is not according to the rules when a war breaks out between two countries after some question merely of the rectification of a frontier, or when a sick man dies after nothing more serious than a swelling of the liver) was how Saint-Loup had contrived to follow up those words, which implied a distinct shade of friendliness, with an action which in no way arose out of them, which they had not, so to speak, announced, that action of an arm raised in defiance not only of the rights of man but of the law of cause and effect, that action created *ex nihilo*. Fortunately the journalist who, staggering back from the violence of the blow, had turned pale and hesitated for a moment, did not retaliate. As for his friends, one of them had promptly turned away his head and was looking fixedly into the wings for some one who evidently was not there; the second pretended that a speck of dust had got into his eye, and began rubbing and squeezing his eyelid with every sign of being in pain; while the third had rushed off, exclaiming: "Good heavens, I believe the curtain's going up; we shan't get into our seats."

I wanted to speak to Saint-Loup, but he was so full of his indignation with the dancer that it adhered exactly to the surface of his eyeballs; like a subcutaneous structure it distended his cheeks with the result that, his internal agitation expressing itself externally in an entire immobility, he had not even the power of relaxation, the 'play' necessary to take in a word from me and to answer it. The journalist's friends, seeing that the incident was at an end, gathered round him again, still trembling. But, ashamed of having deserted him, they were absolutely determined that he should be made to suppose that they had noticed nothing. And so they dilated, one upon the speck of dust in his eye, one upon his false alarm when he had thought that the curtain was going up, the third upon the astonishing resemblance between a man who had just gone by and the speaker's brother. Indeed they seemed quite to resent their friend's not having shared their several emotions.

"What, didn't it strike you? You must be going blind."

"What I say is that you're a pack of curs," growled the journalist whom Saint-Loup had punished.

Forgetting the poses they had adopted, to be consistent with which they ought—but they did not think of it—to have pretended not to understand what he meant, they fell back on certain expressions traditional in the circumstances: "What's all the excitement? Keep your hair on, old chap. Don't take the bit in your teeth."

I had realised that morning beneath the pear blossom how illusory were the grounds upon which Robert's love for 'Rachel when from the Lord' was based; I was bound now to admit how very real were the sufferings to which that love gave rise. Gradually the feeling that had obsessed him for the last hour, without a break, began to diminish, receded into him, an unoccupied pliable zone appeared in his eyes. I had stopped for a moment at a corner of the Avenue Gabriel from which I had often in the past seen Gilberte appear. I tried for a few seconds to recall those distant impressions, and was hurrying at a 'gymnastic' pace to overtake Saint-Loup when I saw that a gentleman, somewhat shabbily attired, appeared to be talking to him confidentially. I concluded that this was a personal friend of Robert; at the same time they seemed to be drawing even closer to one another; suddenly, as a meteor flashes through the sky, I saw a number of ovoid bodies assume with a giddy swiftness all the positions necessary for them to form, before Saint-Loup's face and body, a flickering constellation. Flung out like stones from a catapult, they seemed to me to be at the very least seven in number. They were merely, however, Saint-Loup's pair of fists, multiplied by the speed with which they were changing their places in this—to all appearance ideal and decorative—arrangement. But this elaborate display was nothing more than a pummelling which Saint-Loup was administering, the true character of which, aggressive rather than aesthetic, was first revealed to me by the aspect of the shabbily dressed gentleman who appeared to be losing at once his self-possession, his lower jaw and a quantity of blood. He gave fictitious explanations to the people who came up to question him, turned his head and, seeing that Saint-Loup had made off and was hastening to rejoin me, stood gazing after him with an offended, crushed, but by no means furious expression on his face. Saint-Loup, on the other hand, was furious, although he himself had received no blow, and his eyes were still blazing with anger when he reached me. The incident was in no way connected (as I had supposed) with the assault in the theatre. It was an impassioned loiterer who, seeing the fine looking young soldier that Saint-Loup was, had made overtures to him. My friend could not get over the audacity of this 'clique' who no longer even waited for the shades of night to cover their operations, and spoke of the suggestion that had been made to him with the same indignation as the newspapers use in reporting an armed assault and robbery, in broad daylight, in the centre of Paris. And yet the recipient of his blow was excusable in one respect, for the trend of the downward slope brings desire so rapidly to the point of enjoyment that beauty by itself appears to imply consent. Now, that Saint-Loup was beautiful was beyond dispute. Castigation such as he had just administered has this value, for men of the type that had accosted him, that it makes them think seriously of their conduct, though never for long enough to enable them to amend their ways and thus escape correction at the hands of the law. And so, although Saint-Loup's arm had shot out instinctively, without any preliminary thought, all such punishments, even when they reinforce the law, are powerless to bring about any uniformity in morals.

These incidents, particularly the one that was weighing most on his mind, seemed to have prompted in Robert a desire to be left alone for a while. After a moment's silence he asked me to leave him, and to go by myself to call on Mme. de Villeparisis. He would join me there, but preferred that we should not enter the room together, so that he might appear to have only just arrived in Paris, instead of having spent half the day already with me.

As I had supposed before making the acquaintance of Mme. de Villeparisis at Balbec, there was a vast difference between the world in which she lived and that of Mme. de Guermantes. Mme. de Villeparisis was one of those women who, born of a famous house, entering by marriage into another no less famous, do not for all that enjoy any great position in the social world, and, apart from a few duchesses who are their nieces or sisters-in-law, perhaps even a crowned head or two, old family friends, see their drawing-rooms filled only by third-rate people, drawn from the middle classes or from a nobility either provincial or tainted in some way, whose presence there has long since driven away all such smart and snobbish folk as are not obliged to come to the house by ties of blood or the claims of a friendship too old to be ignored. Certainly I had no difficulty after the first few minutes in understanding how Mme. de Villeparisis, at Balbec, had come to be so well informed, better than ourselves even, as to the smallest details of the tour through Spain which my father was then making with M. de Norpois. Even this, however, did not make it possible to rest content with the theory that the intimacy—of more than twenty years' standing—between Mme. de Villeparisis and the Ambassador could have been responsible for the lady's loss of caste in a world where the smartest women boasted the attachment of lovers far less respectable than he, not to mention that it was probably years since he had been anything more to the Marquise than just an old friend. Had Mme. de Villeparisis then had other adventures in days gone by? Being then of a more passionate temperament than now, in a calm and religious old age which nevertheless owed some of its mellow colouring to those ardent, vanished years, had she somehow failed, in the country neighbourhood where she had lived for so long, to avoid certain scandals unknown to the younger generation who simply took note of their effect in the unequal and defective composition of a visiting list bound, otherwise, to have been among the purest of any taint of mediocrity? That 'sharp tongue' which her nephew ascribed to her, had it in those far-off days made her enemies? Had it driven her into taking advantage of certain successes with men so as to avenge herself upon women? All this was possible; nor could the exquisitely sensitive way in which—giving so delicate a shade not merely to her words but to her intonation—Mme. de Villeparisis spoke of modesty or generosity be held to invalidate this supposition; for the people who not only speak with approval of certain virtues but actually feel their charm and shew a marvellous comprehension of them (people in fact who will, when they come to write their memoirs, present a worthy picture of those virtues) are often sprung from but not actually part of the silent, simple, artless generation which practised them. That generation is reflected in them but is not continued. Instead of the character which it possessed we find a sensibility, an intelligence which are not conducive to action. And whether or not there had been in the life of Mme. de Villeparisis any of those scandals, which (if there had) the lustre of her name would have blotted out, it was this intellect, resembling rather that of a writer of the second order than that of a woman of position, that was undoubtedly the cause of her social degradation.

It is true that they were not specially elevating, the qualities, such as balance and restraint, which Mme. de Villeparisis chiefly extolled; but to speak of restraint in a manner that shall be entirely adequate, the word 'restraint' is not enough, we require some of the qualities of authorship which presuppose a quite unrestrained exaltation; I had remarked at Balbec that the genius of certain great artists was completely unintelligible to Mme. de Villeparisis; and that all she could do was to make delicate fun of them and to express her incomprehension in a graceful and witty form. But this wit and grace, at the point to which she carried them, became themselves—on another plane, and even although they were employed to belittle the noblest masterpieces—true artistic qualities. Now the effect of such qualities on any social position is a morbid activity of the kind which doctors call elective, and so disintegrating that the most firmly established pillars of society are hard put to it to hold out for any length of time. What artists call intellect seems pure presumption to the fashionable world which, unable to place itself at the sole point of view from which they, the artists, look at and judge things, incapable of understanding the particular attraction to which they yield when they choose an expression or start a friendship, feel in their company an exhaustion, an irritation, from which antipathy very shortly springs. And yet in her conversation, and the same may be said of the *Memoirs* which she afterwards published, Mme. de Villeparisis shewed nothing but a sort of grace that was eminently social. Having passed by great works without mastering, sometimes without even noticing them, she had preserved from the period in which she had lived and which, moreover, she described with great aptness and charm, little more than the most frivolous of the gifts that they had had to offer her. But a narrative of this sort, even when it treats exclusively of subjects that are not intellectual, is still a work of the intellect, and to give in a book or in conversation, which is almost the same thing, a deliberate impression of frivolity, a serious touch is required which a purely frivolous person would be incapable of supplying. In a certain book of reminiscences written by a woman and regarded as a masterpiece, the phrase that people quote as a model of airy grace has always made me suspect that, in order to arrive at such a pitch of lightness, the author must originally have had a rather stodgy education, a boring culture, and that as a girl she probably appeared to her friends an insufferable prig. And between certain literary qualities and social failure the connexion is so inevitable that when we open Mme. de Villeparisis's *Memoirs* to-day, on any page a fitting epithet, a sequence of metaphors will suffice to enable the reader to reconstruct the deep but icy bow which must have been bestowed on the old Marquise on the staircases of the Embassies by a snob like Mme. Leroi, who perhaps may have left a card on her when she went to call on the Guermantes, but never set foot in her house for fear of losing caste among all the doctors' or solicitors' wives whom she would find there. A bluestocking Mme. de Villeparisis had perhaps been in her earliest youth, and, intoxicated with the ferment of her own knowledge, had perhaps failed to realise the importance of not applying to people in society, less intelligent and less educated than herself, those cutting strokes which the injured party never forgets.

Moreover, talent is not a separate appendage which one artificially attaches to those qualities which make for social success, in order to create from the whole what people in society call a 'complete woman.' It is the living product of a certain moral complexion, from which as a rule many moral qualities are lacking and in which there predominates a sensibility of which other manifestations such as we do not notice in a book may make themselves quite distinctly felt in the course of a life, certain curiosities for instance, certain whims, the desire to go to this place or that for one's own amusement and not with a view to the extension, the maintenance or even the mere exercise of one's social relations. I had seen at Balbec Mme. de Villeparisis hemmed in by a bodyguard of her own servants without even a glance, as she passed, at the people sitting in the hall of the hotel. But I had had a presentiment that this abstention was due not to indifference, and it seemed that she had not always confined herself to it. She would get a sudden craze to know some one or other because she had seen him and thought him good-looking, or merely because she had been told that he was amusing, or because he had struck her as different from the people she knew, who at this period, when she had not yet begun to appreciate them because she imagined that they would never fail her, belonged, all of them, to the purest cream of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. To the bohemian, the humble middle-class gentleman whom she had marked out with her favour she was obliged to address invitations the importance of which he was unable to appreciate, with an insistence which began gradually to depreciate her in the eyes of the snobs who were in the habit of estimating the smartness of a house by the people whom its mistress excluded rather than by those whom she entertained. Certainly, if at a given moment in her youth Mme. de Villeparisis, surfeited with the satisfaction of belonging to the fine flower of the aristocracy, had found a sort of amusement in scandalising the people among whom she lived, and in deliberately impairing her own position in society, she had begun to attach its full importance to that position once it was definitely lost. She had wished to shew the Duchesses that she was better than they, by saying and doing all the things that they dared not say or do. But now that they all, save such as were closely related to her, had ceased to call, she felt herself diminished, and sought once more to reign, but with another sceptre than that of wit. She would have liked to attract to her house all those women whom she had taken such pains to drive away. How many women's lives, lives of which little enough is known (for we all live in different worlds according to our ages, and the discretion of their elders prevents the young from forming any clear idea of the past and so completing the cycle), have been divided in this way into contrasted periods, the last being entirely devoted to the reconquest of what in the second has been so light-heartedly flung on the wind. Flung on the wind in what way? The young people are all the less capable of imagining it, since they see before them an elderly and respectable Marquise de Villeparisis and have no idea that the grave diarist of the present day, so dignified beneath her pile of snowy hair, can ever have been a gay midnight-reveller who was perhaps the delight in those days, devoured the fortunes perhaps of men now sleeping in their graves; that she should also have set to work, with a persevering and natural industry, to destroy the position which she owed to her high birth does not in the least imply that even at that remote period Mme. de Villeparisis did not attach great importance to her position. In the same way the web of isolation, of inactivity in which a neurasthenic lives may be woven by him from morning to night without therefore seeming endurable, and while he is hastening to add another mesh to the net which holds him captive, it is possible that he is dreaming only of dancing, sport and travel. We are at work every moment upon giving its form to our life, but we do so by copying unintentionally, like the example in a book, the features of the person that we are and not of him who we should like to be. The disdainful bow of Mme. Leroi might to some extent be expressive of the true nature of Mme. de Villeparisis; it in no way corresponded to her ambition.

No doubt at the same moment at which Mme. Leroi was—to use an expression beloved of Mme. Swann—'cutting' the Marquise, the latter could seek consolation in remembering how Queen Marie-Amélie had once said to her: "You are just like a daughter to me." But such marks of royal friendship, secret and unknown to the world, existed for the Marquise alone, dusty as the diploma of an old Conservatoire medalist. The only true social advantages are those that create life, that can disappear without the person who has benefited by them needing to try to keep them or to make them public, because on the same day a hundred others will take their place. And for all that she could remember the Queen's using those words to her, she would nevertheless have bartered them gladly for the permanent faculty of being asked everywhere which Mme. Leroi possessed, as in a restaurant a great but unknown artist whose genius is written neither in the lines of his bashful face nor in the antiquated cut of his threadbare coat, would willingly be even the young stock-jobber, of the lowest grade of society, who is sitting with a couple of actresses at a neighbouring table to which in an obsequious and incessant chain come hurrying manager, head waiter, pages and even the scullions who file out of the kitchen to salute him, as in the fairy-tales, while the wine waiter advances, dust-covered like his bottles, limping and dazed, as if on his way up from the cellar he had twisted his foot before emerging into the light of day.

It must be remarked, however, that in Mme. de Villeparisis's drawing-room the absence of Mme. Leroi, if it distressed the lady of the house, passed unperceived by the majority of her guests. They were entirely ignorant of the peculiar position which Mme. Leroi occupied, a position known only to the fashionable world, and never doubted that Mme. de Villeparisis's receptions were, as the readers of her *Memoirs* to-day are convinced that they must have been, the most brilliant in Paris.

On the occasion of this first call which, after leaving Saint-Loup, I went to pay on Mme. Villeparisis, following the advice given by M. de Norpois to my father, I found her in her drawing-room hung with yellow silk, against which the sofas and the admirable armchairs upholstered in Beauvais tapestry stood out with the almost purple redness of ripe raspberries. Side by side with the Guermantes and Villeparisis portraits one saw those—gifts from the sitters themselves—of Queen Marie-Amélie, the Queen of the Belgians, the Prince de Joinville and the Empress of Austria. Mme. de Villeparisis herself, capped with an old-fashioned bonnet of black lace (which she preserved with the same instinctive sense of local or historical colour as a Breton inn-keeper who, however Parisian his customers may have become, feels it more in keeping to make his maids dress in coifs and wide sleeves), was seated at a little desk on which in front of her, as well as her brushes, her palette and an unfinished flower-piece in water-colours, were arranged in glasses, in saucers, in cups, moss-roses, zinnias, maidenhair ferns, which on account of the sudden influx of callers she had just left off painting, and which had the effect of being piled on a florist's counter in some eighteenth-century mezzotint. In this drawing-room, which had been slightly heated on purpose because the Marquise had caught cold on the journey from her house in the country, there were already when I arrived a librarian with whom Mme. de Villeparisis had spent the morning in selecting the autograph letters to herself from various historical personages which were to figure in facsimile as documentary evidence in the *Memoirs* which she was preparing for the press, and a historian, solemn and tongue-tied, who hearing that she had inherited and still possessed a portrait of the Duchesse de Montmorency, had come to ask her permission to reproduce it as a plate in his work on the Fronde; a party strengthened presently by the addition of my old friend Bloch, now a rising dramatist, upon whom she counted to secure the gratuitous services of actors and actresses at her next series of afternoon parties. It was true that the social kaleidoscope was in the act of turning and that the Dreyfus case was shortly to hurl the Jews down to the lowest rung of the social ladder. But, for one thing, the anti-Dreyfus cyclone might rage as it would, it is not in the first hour of a storm that the waves are highest. In the second place, Mme. de Villeparisis, leaving a whole section of her family to fulminate against the Jews, had hitherto kept herself entirely aloof from the Case and never gave it a thought. Lastly, a young man like Bloch, whom no one knew, might pass unperceived, whereas leading Jews, representatives of their party, were already threatened. He had his chin pointed now by a goat-beard, wore double glasses and a long frock coat, and carried a glove like a roll of papyrus in his hand. The Rumanians, the Egyptians, the Turks may hate the Jews. But in a French drawing-room the differences between those peoples are not so apparent, and an Israelite making his entry as though he were emerging from the heart of the desert, his body crouching like a hyæna's, his neck thrust obliquely forward, spreading himself in profound 'salaams,' completely satisfies a certain taste for the oriental. Only it is essential that the Jew should not be actually 'in' society, otherwise he will readily assume the aspect of a lord and his manners become so Gallicised that on his face a rebellious nose, growing like a nasturtium in any but the right direction, will make one think rather of Mascarille's nose than of Solomon's. But Bloch, not having been rendered supple by the gymnastics of the Faubourg, nor ennobled by a crossing with England or Spain, remained for a lover of the exotic as strange and savoury a spectacle, in spite of his European costume, as one of Decamps's Jews. Marvellous racial power which from the dawn of time thrusts to the surface, even in modern Paris, on the stage of our theatres, behind the pigeonholes of our public offices, at a funeral, in the street, a solid phalanx, setting their mark upon our modern ways of hairdressing, absorbing, making us forget, disciplining the frock coat which on them remains not at all unlike the garment in which Assyrian scribes are depicted in ceremonial attire on the frieze of a monument at Susa before the gates of the Palace of Darius. (Later in the afternoon Bloch might have imagined that it was out of anti-semitic malice that M. de Charlus inquired whether his first name was Jewish, whereas it was simply from aesthetic interest and love of local colour.) But, to revert for a moment, when we speak of racial persistence we do not accurately convey the impression we receive from Jews, Greeks, Persians, all those peoples whom it is better to leave with their differences. We know from classical paintings the faces of the ancient Greeks, we have seen Assyrians on the walls of a palace at Susa. And so we feel, on encountering in a Paris drawing-room Orientals belonging to one or another group, that we are in the presence of creatures whom the forces of necromancy must have called to life. We knew hitherto only a superficial image; behold it has gained depth, it extends into three dimensions, it moves. The young Greek lady, daughter of a rich banker and the latest favourite of society, looks exactly like one of those dancers who in the chorus of a ballet at once historical and aesthetic symbolise in flesh and blood the art of Hellas; and yet in the theatre the setting makes these images somehow trite; the spectacle, on the other hand, to which the entry into a drawing-room of a Turkish lady or a Jewish gentleman admits us, by animating their features makes them appear stranger still, as if they really were creatures evoked by the effort of a medium. It is the soul (or rather the pigmy thing to which—up to the present, at any rate—the soul is reduced in this sort of materialisation), it is the soul of which we have caught glimpses hitherto in museums alone, the soul of the ancient Greeks, of the ancient Hebrews, torn from a life at once insignificant and transcendental, which seems to be enacting before our eyes this disconcerting pantomime. In the young Greek lady who is leaving the room what we seek in vain to embrace is the figure admired long ago on the side of a vase. I felt that if I had in the light of Mme. de Villeparisis's drawing-room taken photographs of Bloch, they would have furnished of Israel the same image—so disturbing because it does not appear to emanate from humanity, so deceiving because all the same it is so strangely like humanity—which we find in spirit photographs. There is nothing, to speak more generally, not even the insignificance of the remarks made by the people among whom we spend our lives, that does not give us a sense of the supernatural, in our everyday world where even a man of genius from whom we expect, gathered as though around a turning-table, to learn the secret of the Infinite utters only these words—the same that had just issued from the lips of Bloch: "Take care of my top hat."

"Oh, Ministers, my dear sir," Mme. de Villeparisis was saying, addressing herself specially to my friend, and picking up the thread of a conversation which had been broken by my arrival: "nobody ever wanted to see them. I was only a child at the time, but I can remember so well the King begging my grandfather to invite M. Decazes to a rout at which my father was to dance with the Duchesse de Berry. 'It will give me pleasure, Florimond,' said the King. My grandfather, who was a little deaf, thought he had said M. de Castries, which seemed a perfectly natural thing to ask. When he understood that it was M. Decazes, he was furious at first, but he gave in, and wrote a note the same evening to M. Decazes, begging him to pay my grandfather the compliment and give him the honour of his presence at the ball which he was giving the following week. For we were polite, sir, in those days, and no hostess would have dreamed of simply sending her card and writing on it 'Tea' or 'Dancing' or 'Music.' But if we understood politeness we were not incapable of impertinence either. M. Decazes accepted, but the day before the ball it was given out that my grandfather felt indisposed and had cancelled his invitations. He had obeyed the King, but he had not had M. Decazes at his ball. . . . Yes, sir, I remember M. Molé very well, he was a clever man—he shewed that in his reception of M. de Vigny at the Academy—but he was very pompous, and I can see him now coming downstairs to dinner in his own house with his tall hat in his hand."

"Ah! that is typically suggestive of what must have been a pretty perniciously philistine epoch, for it was no doubt a universal habit to carry one's hat in one's hand in one's own house," observed Bloch, anxious to make the most of so rare an opportunity of learning from an eyewitness details of the aristocratic life of another day, while the librarian, who was a sort of intermittent secretary to the Marquise, gazed at her tenderly as though he were saying to the rest of us: "There, you see what she's like, she knows everything, she has met everybody, you can ask her anything you like, she's quite amazing."

"Oh, dear, no," replied Mme. de Villeparisis, drawing nearer to her as she spoke the glass containing the maidenhair which presently she would begin again to paint, "it was a habit M. Molé had; that was all. I never saw my father carry his hat in the house, except of course when the King came, because the King being at home wherever he is the master of the house is only a visitor then in his own drawing-room."

"Aristotle tells us in the second chapter of . . ." ventured M. Pierre, the historian of the Fronde, but so timidly that no one paid any attention. Having been suffering for some weeks from a nervous insomnia which resisted every attempt at treatment, he had given up going to bed, and, half-dead with exhaustion, went out only whenever his work made it imperative. Incapable of repeating at all often these expeditions which, simple enough for other people, cost him as much effort as if, to make them, he was obliged to come down from the moon, he was surprised to be brought up so frequently against the fact that other people's lives were not organised on a constant and permanent basis so as to furnish the maximum utility to the sudden outbursts of his own. He sometimes found the doors shut of a library which he had reached only after setting himself artificially on his feet and in a frock coat like some automaton in a story by Mr. Wells. Fortunately he had found Mme. de Villeparisis at home and was going to be shewn the portrait.

Meanwhile he was cut short by Bloch. "Indeed," the latter remarked, referring to what Mme. de Villeparisis had said as to the etiquette for royal visits. "Do you know, I never knew that," as though it were strange that he should not have known it always.

"Talking of that sort of visit, you heard the stupid joke my nephew Basin played on me yesterday morning?" Mme. de Villeparisis asked the librarian. "He told my people, instead of announcing him, to say that it was the Queen of Sweden who had called to see me."

"What! He made them tell you just like that! I say, he must have a nerve," exclaimed Bloch with a shout of laughter, while the historian smiled with a stately timidity.

"I was quite surprised, because I had only been back from the country a few days; I had specially arranged, just to be left in peace for a little, that no one was to be told that I was in Paris, and I asked myself how the Queen of Sweden could have heard so soon," went on Mme. de Villeparisis, leaving her guests amazed to find that a visit from the Queen of Sweden was in itself nothing out of the common to their hostess.

Earlier in the day Mme. de Villeparisis might have been collaborating with the librarian in arranging the illustrations to her *Memoirs*; now she was, quite unconsciously, trying their effect on an average public typical of that from which she would eventually have to enlist her readers. Hers might be different in many ways from a really fashionable drawing-room in which you would have been struck by the absence of a number of middle class ladies to whom Mme. de Villeparisis was 'at home,' and would have noticed instead such brilliant leaders of fashion as Mme. Leroi had in course of time managed to secure, but this distinction is not perceptible in her *Memoirs*, from which certain unimportant friendships of the author have disappeared because there is never any occasion to refer to them; while the absence of those who did not come to see her leaves no gap because, in the necessarily restricted space at the author's disposal, only a few persons can appear, and if these persons are royal personages, historic personalities, then the utmost impression of distinction which any volume of memoirs can convey to the public is achieved. In the opinion of Mme. Leroi, Mme. de Villeparisis's parties were third-rate; and Mme. de Villeparisis felt the sting of Mme. Leroi's opinion. But hardly anyone to-day remembers who Mme. Leroi was, her opinions have vanished into thin air, and it is the drawing-room of Mme. de Villeparisis, frequented as it was by the Queen of Sweden, and as it had been by the Duc d'Aumale, the Duc de Broglie. Thiers, Montalembert, Mgr. Dupanloup, which will be looked upon as one of the most brilliant of the nineteenth century by that posterity which has not changed since the days of Homer and Pindar, and for which the enviable things are exalted birth, royal or quasi-royal, and the friendship of kings, the leaders of the people and other eminent men.

Now of all this Mme. de Villeparisis had her share in the people who still came to her house and in the memories—sometimes slightly 'touched up'—by means of which she extended her social activity into the past. And then there was M. de Norpois who, while unable to restore his friend to any substantial position in society, did indeed bring to her house such foreign or French statesmen as might have need of his services and knew that the only effective method of securing them was to pay court to Mme. de Villeparisis. Possibly Mme. Leroi also knew these European celebrities. But, as a well-mannered woman who avoids anything that suggests the bluestocking, she would as little have thought of mentioning the Eastern question to her Prime Ministers as of discussing the nature of love with her novelists and philosophers. "Love?" she had once replied to a pushing lady who had asked her: "What are your views on love?"—"Love? I make it, constantly, but I never talk about it." When she had any of these literary or political lions in her house she contented herself, as did the Duchesse de Guermantes, with setting them down to play poker. They often preferred this to the serious conversations on general ideas in which Mme. de Villeparisis forced them to engage. But these conversations, ridiculous as in the social sense they may have been, have furnished the *Memoirs* of Mme. de Villeparisis with those admirable passages, those dissertations on politics which read so well in volumes of autobiography, as they do in Corneille's tragedies. Furthermore, the parties of the Villeparisis of this world are alone destined to be handed down to posterity, because the

Lerois of this world cannot write, and, if they could, would not have the time. And if the literary bent of the Villeparisis is the cause of the Lerois' disdain, the disdain of the Lerois does, in its turn, a singular service to the literary bent of the Villeparisis by affording the bluestockings that leisure which the career of letters requires. God, Whose Will it is that there should be a few books in the world well written, breathes with that purpose such disdain into the hearts of the Lerois, for He knows that if these should invite the Villeparisis to dinner the latter would at once rise from their writing tables and order their carriages to be round at eight.

Presently there came into the room, with slow and solemn step, an old lady of tall stature who, beneath the raised brim of her straw hat, revealed a monumental pile of snowy hair in the style of Marie-Antoinette. I did not then know that she was one of three women who were still to be seen in Parisian society and who, like Mme. de Villeparisis, while all of the noblest birth, had been reduced, for reasons which were now lost in the night of time and could have been told us only by some old gallant of their period, to entertaining only certain of the dregs of society who were not sought after elsewhere. Each of these ladies had her own 'Duchesse de Guermantes,' the brilliant niece who came regularly to pay her respects, but none of them could have succeeded in attracting to her house the 'Duchesse de Guermantes' of either of the others. Mme. de Villeparisis was on the best of terms with these three ladies, but she did not like them. Perhaps the similarity between their social position and her own gave her an impression of them which was not pleasing. Besides, soured bluestockings as they were, seeking by the number and frequency of the drawing-room comedies which they arranged in their houses to give themselves the illusion of a regular salon, there had grown up among them a rivalry which the decay of her fortune in the course of a somewhat tempestuous existence reduced for each of them, when it was a question of securing the kind assistance of a professional actor or actress, into a sort of struggle for life. Furthermore, the lady with the Marie-Antoinette hair, whenever she set eyes on Mme. de Villeparisis, could not help being reminded of the fact that the Duchesse de Guermantes did not come to her Fridays. Her consolation was that at these same Fridays she could always count on having, blood being thicker than water, the Princesse de Poix, who was her own personal Guermantes, and who never went near Mme. de Villeparisis, albeit Mme. de Poix was an intimate friend of the Duchess.

Nevertheless from the mansion on the Quai Malaquais to the drawing-rooms of the Rue de Tournon, the Rue de la Chaise and the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, a bond as compelling as it was hateful united the three fallen goddesses, as to whom I would fain have learned by searching in some dictionary of social mythology through what gallant adventure, what sacrilegious presumption, they had incurred their punishment. Their common brilliance of origin, the common decay of their present state entered largely, no doubt, into the necessity which compelled them, while hating one another, to frequent one another's society. Besides, each of them found in the others a convenient way of being polite to her own guests. How should these fail to suppose that they had scaled the most inaccessible peak of the Faubourg when they were introduced to a lady with a string of titles whose sister was married to a Duc de Sagan or a Prince de Ligne? Especially as there was infinitely more in the newspapers about these sham salons than about the genuine ones. Indeed these old ladies' 'men about town' nephews—and Saint-Loup the foremost of them—when asked by a friend to introduce him to people, would answer at once "I will take you to see my aunt Villeparisis," (or whichever it was) "you meet interesting people there." They knew very well that this would mean less trouble for themselves than trying to get the said friends invited by the smart nieces or sisters-in-law of these ladies. Certain very old men, and young women who had heard it from those men, told me that if these ladies were no longer received in society it was because of the extraordinary irregularity of their conduct, which, when I objected that irregular conduct was not necessarily a barrier to social success, was represented to me as having gone far beyond anything that we know to-day. The misconduct of these solemn dames who held themselves so erect assumed on the lips of those who hinted at it something that I was incapable of imagining, proportionate to the magnitude of prehistoric days, to the age of the mammoth. In a word, these three Parcae with their white or blue or red locks had spun the fatal threads of an incalculable number of gentlemen. I felt that the people of to-day exaggerated the vices of those fabulous times, like the Greeks who created Icarus, Theseus, Heracles out of men who had been but little different from those who long afterwards deified them. But one does not tabulate the sum of a person's vices until he has almost ceased to be in a fit state to practise them, when from the magnitude of his social punishment, which is then nearing the completion of its term and which alone one can estimate, one measures, one imagines, one exaggerates that of the crime that has been committed. In that gallery of symbolical figures which is 'society,' the really light women, the true Messalinas, invariably present the solemn aspect of a lady of at least seventy, with an air of lofty distinction, who entertains everyone she can but not everyone she would like to have, to whose house women will never consent to go whose own conduct falls in any way short of perfection, to whom the Pope regularly sends his Golden Rose, and who as often as not has written—on the early days of Lamartine—an essay that has been crowned by the French Academy. "How d'ye do, Alix?" Mme. de Villeparisis greeted the Marie-Antoinette lady, which lady cast a searching glance round the assembly to see whether there was not in this drawing-room any item that might be a valuable addition to her own, in which case she would have to discover it for herself, for Mme. de Villeparisis, she was sure, would be spiteful enough to try to keep it from her. Thus Mme. de Villeparisis took good care not to introduce Bloch to the old lady for fear of his being asked to produce the same play that he was arranging for her in the drawing-room of the Quai Malaquais. Besides it was only tit for tat. For, the evening before, the old lady had had Mme. Ristori, who had recited, and had taken care that Mme. de Villeparisis, from whom she had filched the Italian artist, should not hear of this function until it was over. So that she should not read it first in the newspapers and feel annoyed, the old lady had come in person to tell her about it, shewing no sense of guilt. Mme. de Villeparisis, considering that an introduction of myself was not likely to have the same awkward results as that of Bloch, made me known to the Marie-Antoinette of the Quai Malaquais. The latter, who sought, by making the fewest possible movements, to preserve in her old age those lines, as of a Coysevox goddess, which had years ago charmed the young men of fashion and which spurious poets still celebrated in rhymed charades—and had acquired the habit of a lofty and compensating stiffness common to all those whom a personal degradation obliges to be continually making advances—just perceptibly lowered her head with a frigid majesty, and, turning the other way, took no more notice of me than if I had not existed. By this crafty attitude she seemed to be assuring Mme. de Villeparisis: "You see, I'm nowhere near him; please understand that I'm not interested—in any sense of the word, you old cat—in little boys." But when, twenty minutes later, she left the room, taking advantage of the general conversation, she slipped into my ear an invitation to come to her box the following Friday with another of the three, whose high-sounding name—she had been born a Choiseul, moreover—had a prodigious effect on me.

"I understand, sir, that you are thinkin' of writin' somethin' about Mme. la Duchesse de Montmorency," said Mme. de Villeparisis to the historian of the Fronde in that grudging tone which she allowed, quite unconsciously, to spoil the effect of her great and genuine kindness, a tone due to the shrivelling crossness, the sense of grievance that is a physiological accompaniment of age, as well as to the affectation of imitating the almost rustic speech of the old nobility: "I'm goin' to let you see her portrait, the original of the copy they have in the Louvre."

She rose, laying down her brushes beside the flowers, and the little apron which then came into sight at her waist, and which she wore so as not to stain her dress with paints, added still further to the impression of an old peasant given by her bonnet and her big spectacles, and offered a sharp contrast to the luxury of her appointments, the butler who had brought in the tea and cakes, the liveried footman for whom she now rang to light up the portrait of the Duchesse de Montmorency, Abbess of one of the most famous Chapters in the East of France. Everyone had risen. "What is rather amusin'," said our hostess, "is that in these Chapters where our great-aunts were so often made Abbesses, the daughters of the King of France would not have been admitted. They were very close corporations." "Not admit the King's daughters," cried Bloch in amazement, "why ever not?" "Why, because the House of France had not enough quarterin's after that low marriage." Bloch's bewilderment increased. "A low marriage? The House of France? When was that?" "Why, when they married into the Medicis," replied Mme. de Villeparisis in the most natural manner. "It's a fine picture, ain't it, and in a perfect state of preservation," she added.

"My dear," put in the Marie-Antoinette lady, "surely you remember that when I brought Liszt to see you he said that it was this one that was the copy."

"I should bow to any opinion of Liszt on music, but not on painting. Besides, he was quite off his head then, and I don't remember his ever saying anything of the sort. But it wasn't you that brought him here. I had met him any number of times at dinner at Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein's."

Alix's shot had missed fire; she stood silent, erect and motionless. Plastered with layers of powder, her face had the appearance of a face of stone. And, as the profile was noble, she seemed, on a triangular and moss-grown pedestal hidden by her cape, the time-worn stucco goddess of a park.

"Ah, I see another fine portrait," began the historian.

The door opened and the Duchesse de Guermantes entered the room.

"Well, how are you?" Mme. de Villeparisis greeted her without moving her head, taking from her apron-pocket a hand which she held out to the newcomer; and then ceasing at once to take any notice of her niece, in order to return to the historian: "That is the portrait of the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld. . . ."

A young servant with a bold manner and a charming face (but so finely chiselled, to ensure its perfection, that the nose was a little red and the rest of the skin slightly flushed as though they were still smarting from the recent and sculptural incision) came in bearing a card on a salver.

"It is that gentleman who has been several times to see Mme. la Marquise."

"Did you tell him I was at home?"

"He heard the voices."

"Oh, very well then, shew him in. It's a man who was introduced to me," she explained. "He told me he was very anxious to come to the house. I certainly never said he might. But here he's taken the trouble to call five times now; it doesn't do to hurt people's feelings. Sir," she went on to me, "and you, Sir," to the historian of the Fronde, "let me introduce my niece, the Duchesse de Guermantes."

The historian made a low bow, as I did also, and since he seemed to suppose that some friendly remark ought to follow this salute, his eyes brightened and he was preparing to open his mouth when he was once more frozen by the sight of Mme. de Guermantes who had taken advantage of the independence of her torso to throw it forward with an exaggerated politeness and bring it neatly back to a position of rest without letting face or eyes appear to have noticed that anyone was standing before them; after breathing a gentle sigh she contented herself with manifesting the nullity of the impression that had been made on her by the sight of the historian and myself by performing certain movements of her nostrils with a precision that testified to the absolute inertia of her unoccupied attention.

The importunate visitor entered the room, making straight for Mme. de Villeparisis with an ingenuous, fervent air: it was Legrandin.

"Thank you so very much for letting me come and see you," he began, laying stress on the word 'very.' "It is a pleasure of a quality altogether rare and subtle that you confer on an old solitary; I assure you that its repercussion . . ." He stopped short on catching sight of me.

"I was just shewing this gentleman a fine portrait of the Duchesse de

La Rochefoucauld, the wife of the author of the *Maxims*; it's a family picture."

Mme. de Guermantes meanwhile had greeted Alix, with apologies for not having been able, that year as in every previous year, to go and see her. "I hear all about you from Madeleine," she added.

"She was at luncheon with me to-day," said the Marquise of the Quai Malaquais, with the satisfying reflexion that Mme. de Villeparisis could never say that.

Meanwhile I had been talking to Bloch, and fearing, from what I had been told of his father's change of attitude towards him, that he might be envying my life, I said to him that his must be the happier of the two. My remark was prompted solely by my desire to be friendly. But such friendliness readily convinces those who cherish a high opinion of themselves of their own good fortune, or gives them a desire to convince other people. "Yes, I do lead a delightful existence," Bloch assured me with a beatified smile. "I have three great friends; I do not wish for one more; an adorable mistress; I am infinitely happy. Rare is the mortal to whom Father Zeus accords so much felicity." I fancy that he was anxious principally to extol himself and to make me envious. Perhaps too there was some desire to shew originality in his optimism. It was evident that he did not wish to reply in the commonplace phraseology that everybody uses: "Oh, it was nothing, really," and so forth, when, to my question: "Was it a good show?" put with regard to an afternoon dance at his house to which I had been prevented from going, he replied in a level, careless tone, as if the dance had been given by some one else: "Why, yes, it was quite a good show, couldn't have been better. It was really charming!"

"What you have just told us interests me enormously," said Legrandin to Mme. de Villeparisis, "for I was saying to myself only the other day that you shewed a marked likeness to him in the clear-cut turn of your speech, in a quality which I will venture to describe by two contradictory terms, monumental rapidity and immortal instantaneousness. I should have liked this afternoon to take down all the things you say; but I shall remember them. They are, in a phrase which comes, I think, from Joubert, friends of the memory. You have never read Joubert? Oh! he would have admired you so! I will take the liberty this evening of sending you a set of him, it is a privilege to make you a present of his mind. He had not your strength. But he had a great deal of charm all the same."

I would have gone up to Legrandin at once and spoken to him, but he kept as far away from me as he could, no doubt in the hope that I might not overhear the stream of flattery which, with a remarkable felicity of expression, he kept pouring out, whatever the topic, to Mme. de Villeparisis.

She shrugged her shoulders, smiling, as though he had been trying to make fun of her, and turned to the historian.

"And this is the famous Marie de Rohan, Duchesse de Chevreuse, who was married first of all to M. de Luynes."

"My dear, speaking of Mme. de Luynes reminds me of Yolande; she came to me yesterday evening, and if I had known that you weren't engaged I'd have sent round to ask you to come. Mme. Ristori turned up quite by chance, and recited some poems by Queen Carmen Sylva in the author's presence. It was too beautiful!"

"What treachery!" thought Mme. de Villeparisis. "Of course that was what she was whispering about the other day to Mme. de Beaulaincourt and Mme. de Chaponay. I had no engagement," she replied, "but I should not have come. I heard Ristori in her great days, she's a mere wreck now. Besides I detest Carmen Sylva's poetry. Ristori came here once, the Duchess of Aosta brought her, to recite a canto of the *Inferno,* by Dante. In that sort of thing she's incomparable."

Alix bore the blow without flinching. She remained marble. Her gaze was piercing and blank, her nose proudly arched. But the surface of one cheek was scaling. A faint, strange vegetation, green and pink, was invading her chin. Perhaps another winter would level her with the dust.

"Now, sir, if you are fond of painting, look at the portrait of Mme. de Montmorency," Mme. de Villeparisis said to Legrandin, to stop the flow of compliments which was beginning again.

Seizing her opportunity, while his back was turned, Mme. de Guermantes pointed to him, with an ironical, questioning look at her aunt.

"It's M. Legrandin," murmured Mme. de Villeparisis, "he has a sister called Mme. de Cambremer, not that that conveys any more to you than it does to me."

"What! Oh, but I know her quite well!" exclaimed Mme. de Guermantes, and put her hand over her lips. "That is to say, I don't know her, but for some reason or other Basin, who meets the husband heaven knows where, took it into his head to tell the wretched woman she might call on me. And she did. I can't tell you what it was like. She informed me that she had been to London, and gave me a complete catalogue of all the things in the British Museum. And this very day, the moment I leave your house, I'm going, just as you see me now, to drop a card on the monster. And don't for a moment suppose that it's an easy thing to do. On the pretence that she's dying of some disease she's always at home, it doesn't matter whether you arrive at seven at night or nine in the morning, she's ready for you with a dish of strawberry tarts.

"No, but seriously, you know, she is a monstrosity," Mme. de Guermantes replied to a questioning glance from her aunt. "She's an impossible person, she talks about 'plumitives' and things like that." "What does 'plumitive' mean?" asked Mme. de Villeparisis. "I haven't the slightest idea!" cried the Duchess in mock indignation. "I don't want to know. I don't speak that sort of language." And seeing that her aunt really did not know what a plumitive was, to give herself the satisfaction of shewing that she was a scholar as well as a purist, and to make fun of her aunt, now, after making fun of Mme. de Cambremer: "Why, of course," she said, with a half-laugh which the last traces of her pretended ill humour kept in check, "everybody knows what it means; a plumitive is a writer, a person who holds a pen. But it's a dreadful word. It's enough to make your wisdom teeth drop out. Nothing will ever make me use words like that.

"And so that's the brother, is it? I hadn't realized that yet. But after all it's not inconceivable. She has the same doormat docility and the same mass of information like a circulating library. She's just as much of a flatterer as he is, and just as boring. Yes, I'm beginning to see the family likeness now quite plainly."

"Sit down, we're just going to take a dish of tea," said Mme. de Villeparisis to her niece. "Help yourself; you don't want to look at the pictures of your great-grandmothers, you know them as well as I do."

Presently Mme. de Villeparisis sat down again at her desk and went on with her painting. The rest of the party gathered round her, and I took the opportunity to go up to Legrandin and, seeing no harm myself in his presence in Mme. de Villeparisis's drawing-room and never dreaming how much my words would at once hurt him and make him believe that I had deliberately intended to hurt him, say: "Well, sir, I am almost excused for coming to a tea-party when I find you here too." M. Legrandin concluded from this speech (at least this was the opinion which he expressed of me a few days later) that I was a thoroughly spiteful little wretch who delighted only in doing mischief.

"You might at least have the civility to begin by saying how d'ye do to me," he replied, without offering me his hand and in a coarse and angry voice which I had never suspected him of possessing, a voice which bearing no traceable relation to what he ordinarily said did bear another more immediate and striking relation to something that he was feeling at the moment. What happens is that since we are determined always to keep our feelings to ourselves, we have never given any thought to the manner in which we should express them. And suddenly there is within us a strange and obscene animal making its voice heard, the tones of which may inspire as much terror in the listener who receives the involuntary elliptical irresistible communication of our defect or vice as would the sudden avowal indirectly and uncouthly proffered by a criminal who can no longer refrain from confessing a murder of which one had never imagined him to be guilty. I knew, of course, that idealism, even subjective idealism, did not prevent great philosophers from still having hearty appetites or from presenting themselves with untiring perseverance for election to the Academy. But really Legrandin had no occasion to remind people so often that he belonged to another planet when all his convulsive movements of anger or affability were governed by the desire to occupy a good position on this.

"Naturally, when people pester me twenty times on end to go anywhere," he went on in lower tones, "although I am perfectly free to do what I choose, still I can't behave like an absolute boor."

Mme. de Guermantes had sat down. Her name, accompanied as it was by her title, added to her corporeal dimensions the duchy which projected itself round about her and brought the shadowy, sun-splashed coolness of the woods of Guermantes into this drawing-room, to surround the tuffet on which she was sitting. I felt surprised only that the likeness of those woods was not more discernible on the face of the Duchess, about which there was nothing suggestive of vegetation, and at the most the ruddy discolouration of her cheeks—which ought rather, surely, to have been emblazoned with the name Guermantes—was the effect, but did not furnish a picture of long gallops in the open air. Later on, when she had ceased to interest me, I came to know many of the Duchess's peculiarities, notably (to speak for the moment only of that one of which I already at this time felt the charm though without yet being able to discover what it was) her eyes, in which was held captive as in a picture the blue sky of an afternoon in France, broadly expansive, bathed in light even when no sun shone; and a voice which one would have thought, from its first hoarse sounds, to be almost plebeian, through which there trailed, as over the steps of the church at Combray or the pastry-cook's in the square, the rich and lazy gold of a country sun. But on this first day I discerned nothing, the warmth of my attention volatilised at once the little that I might otherwise have been able to extract from her, in which I should have found some indication of the name Guermantes. In any case, I told myself that it was indeed she who was designated for all the world by the title Duchesse de Guermantes: the inconceivable life which that name signified, this body did indeed contain; it had just introduced that life into a crowd of different creatures, in this room which enclosed it on every side and on which it produced so violent a reaction that I thought I could see, where the extent of that mysterious life ceased, a fringe of effervescence outline its frontiers: round the circumference of the circle traced on the carpet by the balloon of her blue pekin skirt, and in the bright eyes of the Duchess at the point of intersection of the preoccupations, the memories, the incomprehensible, scornful, amused and curious thoughts which filled them from within and the outside images that were reflected on their surface. Perhaps I should have been not quite so deeply stirred had I met her at Mme. de Villeparisis's at an evening party, instead of seeing her thus on one of the Marquise's 'days,' at one of those tea-parties which are for women no more than a brief halt in the course of their afternoon's outing, when, keeping on the hats in which they have been driving through the streets, they waft into the close atmosphere of a drawing-room the quality of the fresh air outside, and give one a better view of Paris in the late afternoon than do the tall, open windows through which one can hear the bowling wheels of their victorias: Mme. de Guermantes wore a boating-hat trimmed with cornflowers, and what they recalled to me was not, among the tilled fields round Combray where I had so often gathered those flowers, on the slope adjoining the Tansonville hedge, the suns of bygone years; it was the scent and dust of twilight as they had been an hour ago, when Mme. de Guermantes drove through them, in the Rue de la Paix. With a smiling, disdainful, vague air, and a grimace on her pursed lips, with the point of her sunshade, as with the extreme tip of an antenna of her mysterious life, she was tracing circles on the carpet; then, with that indifferent attention which begins by eliminating every point of contact with what one is actually studying, her gaze fastened upon each of us in turn; then inspected the sofas and armchairs, but softened this time by that human sympathy which is aroused by the presence, however insignificant, of a thing one knows, a thing that is almost a person; these pieces of furniture were not like us, they belonged vaguely to her world, they were bound up with the life of her aunt; then from the Beauvais furniture her gaze was carried back to the person sitting on it, and resumed then the same air of perspicacity and that same disapproval which the respect that Mme. de Guermantes felt for her aunt would have prevented her from expressing in words, but which she would obviously have felt had she discovered on the chairs, instead of our presence, that of a spot of grease or a layer of dust.

That admirable writer G—— entered the room; he had come to pay a call on Mme. de Villeparisis which he regarded as a tiresome duty. The Duchess, although delighted to see him again, gave him no sign of welcome, but instinctively he made straight for her, the charm that she possessed, her tact, her simplicity making him look upon her as a woman of exceptional intelligence. He was bound, moreover, in common politeness to go and talk to her, for, since he was a pleasant and a distinguished man, Mme. de Guermantes frequently invited him to luncheon even when there were only her husband and herself besides, or in the autumn to Guermantes, making use of this intimacy to have him to dinner occasionally with Royalties who were curious to meet him. For the Duchess liked to entertain certain eminent men, on condition always that they were bachelors, a condition which, even when married, they invariably fulfilled for her, for, as their wives, who were bound to be more or less common, would have been a blot on a drawing-room in which there were never any but the most fashionable beauties in Paris, it was always without them that their husbands were invited; and the Duke, to avoid hurting any possible susceptibility, used to explain to these involuntary widowers that the Duchess never had women in the house, could not endure feminine society, almost as though this had been under doctor's orders, and as he might have said that she could not stay in a room in which there were smells, or eat salt food, or travel with her back to the engine, or wear stays. It was true that these eminent men used to see at the Guermantes' the Princesse de Parme, the Princesse de Sagan (whom Françoise, hearing her constantly mentioned, had taken to calling, in the belief that this feminine ending was required by the laws of accidence, 'the Sagante'), and plenty more, but their presence was accounted for by the explanation that they were relatives, or such very old friends that it was impossible to exclude them. Whether or not they were convinced by the explanations which the Duc de Guermantes had given of the singular malady that made it impossible for the Duchess to associate with other women, the great men duly transmitted them to their wives. Some of these thought that this malady was only an excuse to cloak her jealousy, because the Duchess wished to reign alone over a court of worshippers. Others more simple still thought that perhaps the Duchess had some peculiar habit, a scandalous past it might be, that women did not care to go to her house and that she gave the name of a whim to what was stern necessity. The better among them, hearing their husbands expatiate on the Duchess's marvellous brain, assumed that she must be so far superior to the rest of womankind that she found their society boring since they could not talk intelligently about anything. And it was true that the Duchess was bored by other women, if their princely rank did not render them specially interesting. But the excluded wives were mistaken when they imagined that she chose to entertain men alone in order to be free to discuss with them literature, science and philosophy. For she never referred to these, at least with the great intellectuals. If, by virtue of a family tradition such as makes the daughters of great soldiers preserve, in the midst of their most frivolous distractions, a respect for military matters, she, the granddaughter of women who had been on terms of friendship with Thiers, Mérimée and Augier, felt that a place must always be kept in her drawing-room for men of intellect, she had on the other hand derived from the manner, at once condescending and intimate, in which those famous men had been received at Guermantes the foible of looking on men of talent as family friends whose talent does not dazzle one, to whom one does not speak of their work, and who would not be at all interested if one did. Moreover the type of mind illustrated by Mérimée and Meilhac and Halévy, which was hers also, led her by reaction from the verbal sentimentality of an earlier generation to a style in conversation that rejects everything to do with fine language and the expression of lofty thoughts, so that she made it a sort of element of good breeding when she was with a poet or a musician to talk only of the food that they were eating or the game of cards to which they would afterwards sit down. This abstention had, on a third person not conversant with her ways, a disturbing effect which amounted to mystification. Mme. de Guermantes having asked him whether it would amuse him to come to luncheon to meet this or that famous poet, devoured by curiosity he would arrive at the appointed hour. The Duchess was talking to the poet about the weather. They sat down to luncheon. "Do you like this way of doing eggs?" she asked the poet. On hearing his approval, which she shared, for everything in her own house appeared to her exquisite, including a horrible cider which she imported from Guermantes: "Give Monsieur some more eggs," she would tell the butler, while the anxious fellow-guest sat waiting for what must surely have been the object of the party, since they had arranged to meet, in spite of every sort of difficulty, before the Duchess, the poet and he himself left Paris. But the meal went on, one after another the courses were cleared away, not without having first provided Mme. de Guermantes with opportunities for clever witticisms or apt stories. Meanwhile the poet went on eating, and neither Duke nor Duchess shewed any sign of remembering that he was a poet. And presently the luncheon came to an end and the party broke up, without a word having been said about the poetry which, for all that, everyone admired but to which, by a reserve analogous to that of which Swann had given me a foretaste, no one might refer. This reserve was simply a matter of good form. But for the fellow-guest, if he thought at all about the matter, there was something strangely melancholy about it all, and these meals in the Guermantes household made him think of the hours which timid lovers often spend together in talking trivialities until it is time to part, without—whether from shyness, from audacity or from awkwardness—the great secret which they would have been happier had they confessed ever succeeding in passing from their hearts to their lips. It must, however, be added that this silence with regard to the serious matters which one was always waiting in vain to see approached, if it might pass as characteristic of the Duchess, was by no means constant with her. Mme. de Guermantes had spent her girlhood in a society somewhat different, equally aristocratic but less brilliant and above all less futile than that in which she now lived, and one of wide culture. It had left beneath her present frivolity a sort of bed-rock of greater solidity, invisibly nutritious, to which indeed the Duchess would repair in search (very rarely, though, for she detested pedantry) of some quotation from Victor Hugo or Lamartine which, extremely appropriate, uttered with a look of true feeling from her fine eyes, never failed to surprise and charm her audience. Sometimes, even, without any pretence of authority, pertinently and quite simply, she would give some dramatist and Academician a piece of sage advice, would make him modify a situation or alter an ending.

If, in the drawing-room of Mme. de Villeparisis, just as in the church at Combray, on the day of Mlle. Percepied's wedding, I had difficulty in discovering, in the handsome, too human face of Mme. de Guermantes the unknown element of her name, I at least thought that, when she spoke, her conversation, profound, mysterious, would have a strangeness as of a mediaeval tapestry or a gothic window. But in order that I should not be disappointed by the words which I should hear uttered by a person who called herself Mme. de Guermantes, even if I had not been in love with her, it would not have sufficed that those words were fine, beautiful and profound, they would have had to reflect that amaranthine colour of the closing syllable of her name, that colour which I had on my first sight of her been disappointed not to find in her person and had driven to take refuge in her mind. Of course I had already heard Mme. de Villeparisis, Saint-Loup, people whose intelligence was in no way extraordinary, pronounce without any precaution this name Guermantes, simply as that of a person who was coming to see them or with whom they had promised to dine, without seeming to feel that there were latent in her name the glow of yellowing woods in autumn and a whole mysterious tract of country. But this must have been an affectation on their part, as when the classic poets give us no warning of the profound purpose which they had, all the same, in writing, an affectation which I myself also strove to imitate, saying in the most natural tone: "The Duchesse de Guermantes," as though it were a name that was just like other names. And then everybody assured me that she was a highly intelligent woman, a clever talker, that she was one of a little group of most interesting people: words which became accomplices of my dream. For when they spoke of an intelligent group, of clever talk, it was not at all the sort of intelligence that I knew that I imagined, not even that of the greatest minds, it was not at all with men like Bergotte that I peopled this group. No, by intelligence I understood an ineffable faculty gilded by the sun, impregnated with a sylvan coolness. Indeed, had she made the most intelligent remarks (in the sense in which I understood the word when it was used of a philosopher or critic), Mme. de Guermantes would perhaps have disappointed even more keenly my expectation of so special a faculty than if, in the course of a trivial conversation, she had confined herself to discussing kitchen recipes or the furnishing of a country house, to mentioning the names of neighbours and relatives of her own, which would have given me a picture of her life.

"I thought I should find Basin here, he was meaning to come and see you to-day," said Mme. de Guermantes to her aunt.

"I haven't set eyes on your husband for some days," replied Mme. de Villeparisis in a somewhat nettled tone. "In fact, I haven't seen him—well, I have seen him once, perhaps—since that charming joke he played on me of making my servants announce him as the Queen of Sweden."

Mme. de Guermantes formed a smile by contracting the corners of her mouth as though she were biting her veil.

"We met her at dinner last night at Blanche Leroi's. You wouldn't know her now, she's positively enormous; I'm sure she must have something the matter with her."

"I was just telling these gentlemen that you said she looked like a frog."

Mme. de Guermantes uttered a sort of raucous sound intended to signify that she acknowledged the compliment.

"I don't remember making such a charming comparison, but if she was one before, now she's the frog that has succeeded in swelling to the size of the ox. Or rather, it isn't quite that, because all her swelling is concentrated in front of her waist, she's more like a frog in an interesting condition."

"Ah, that is quite clever," said Mme. de Villeparisis, secretly proud that her guests should be witnessing this display of her niece's wit.

"It is purely *arbitrary,* though," answered Mme. de Guermantes, ironically detaching this selected epithet, as Swann would have done, "for I must admit I never saw a frog in the family way. Anyhow, the frog in question, who, by the way, is not asking for a king, for I never saw her so skittish as she's been since her husband died, is coming to dine with us one day next week. I promised I'd let you know in good time."

Mme. de Villeparisis gave vent to a confused growl, from which emerged: "I know she was dining with the Mecklenburgs the night before last. Hannibal de Bréauté was there. He came and told me about it, and was quite amusing, I must say."

"There was a man there who's a great deal wittier than Babal," said Mme. de Guermantes who, in view of her close friendship with M. de Bréauté-Consalvi, felt that she must advertise their intimacy by the use of this abbreviation. "I mean M. Bergotte."

I had never imagined that Bergotte could be regarded as witty; in fact, I thought of him always as mingling with the intellectual section of humanity, that is to say infinitely remote from that mysterious realm of which I had caught a glimpse through the purple hangings of a theatre box, behind which, making the Duchess smile, M. de Bréauté was holding with her, in the language of the gods, that unimaginable thing, a conversation between people of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. I was stupefied to see the balance upset, and Bergotte rise above M. de Bréauté. But above all I was dismayed to think that I had avoided Bergotte on the evening of *Phèdre,* that I had not gone up and spoken to him, when I heard Mme. de Guermantes say to Mme. de Villeparisis:

"He is the only person I have any wish to know," went on the Duchess, in whom one could always, as at the turn of a mental tide, see the flow of curiosity with regard to well-known intellectuals sweep over the ebb of her aristocratic snobbishness. "It would be such a pleasure."

The presence of Bergotte by my side, which it would have been so easy for me to secure but which I had thought liable to give Mme. de Guermantes a bad impression of myself, would no doubt, on the contrary, have had the result that she would have signalled to me to join her in her box, and would have invited me to bring the eminent writer, one day, to luncheon.

"I gather that he didn't behave very well, he was presented to M. de Cobourg, and never uttered a word to him," said Mme. de Guermantes, dwelling on this odd characteristic as she might have recounted that a Chinaman had blown his nose on a sheet of paper. "He never once said 'Monseigneur' to him," she added, with an air of amusement at this detail, as important to her mind as the refusal of a Protestant, during an audience with the Pope, to go on his knees before his Holiness.

Interested by these idiosyncrasies of Bergotte, she did not, however, appear to consider them reprehensible, and seemed rather to find a certain merit in them, though she would have been put to it to say of what sort. Despite this unusual mode of appreciating Bergotte's originality, it was a fact which I was later on not to regard as wholly negligible that Mme. de Guermantes, greatly to the surprise of many of her friends, did consider Bergotte more witty than M. de Bréauté. Thus it is that such judgments, subversive, isolated, and yet after all just, are delivered in the world of fashion by those rare minds that are superior to the rest. And they sketch then the first rough outlines of the hierarchy of values as the next generation will establish it, instead of abiding eternally by the old standards.

The Comte d'Argencourt, Chargé d'Affaires at the Belgian Legation and a remote connexion of Mme. de Villeparisis, came limping in, followed presently by two young men, the Baron de Guermantes and H. H. the Duc de Châtellerault, whom Mme. de Guermantes greeted with: "How d'ye do, young Châtellerault," in a careless tone and without moving from her tuffet, for she was a great friend of the young Duke's mother, which had given him a deep and lifelong respect for her. Tall, slender, with golden hair and sunny complexions, thoroughly of the Guermantes type, these two young men looked like a condensation of the light of the spring evening which was flooding the spacious room. Following a custom which was the fashion at that time they laid their silk hats on the floor, by their feet. The historian of the Fronde thought that they were embarrassed, like a peasant coming into the mayor's office and not knowing what to do with his hat. Feeling that he ought in charity to come to the rescue of the awkwardness and timidity which he ascribed to them:

"No, no," he said, "don't leave them on the floor, they'll be trodden on."

A glance from the Baron de Guermantes, tilting the plane of his pupils, shot suddenly from them a wave of pure and piercing azure which froze the well-meaning historian.

"What is that person's name?" I was asked by the Baron, who had just been introduced to me by Mme. de Villeparisis.

"M. Pierre," I whispered.

"Pierre what?"

"Pierre: it's his name, he's a historian, a most distinguished man."

"Really? You don't say so."

"No, it's a new fashion with these young men to put their hats on the floor," Mme. de Villeparisis explained. "I'm like you, I can never get used to it. Still, it's better than my nephew Robert, who always leaves his in the hall. I tell him when I see him come in that he looks just like a clockmaker, and I ask him if he's come to wind the clocks."

"You were speaking just now, Madame la Marquise, of M. Molé's hat; we shall soon be able, like Aristotle, to compile a chapter on hats," said the historian of the Fronde, somewhat reassured by Mme. de Villeparisis's intervention, but in so faint a voice that no one but myself overheard him.

"She really is astonishing, the little Duchess," said M. d'Argencourt, pointing to Mme. de Guermantes who was talking to G——. "Whenever there's a famous man in the room you're sure to find him sitting with her. Evidently that must be the lion of the party over there. It can't always be M. de Borelli, of course, or M. Schlumberger or M. d'Avenel. But then it's bound to be M. Pierre Loti or M. Edmond Rostand. Yesterday evening at the Doudeauvilles', where by the way she was looking splendid in her emerald tiara and a pink dress with a long train, she had M. Deschanel on one side and the German Ambassador on the other: she was holding forth to them about China; the general public, at a respectful distance where they couldn't hear what was being said, were wondering whether there wasn't going to be war. Really, you'd have said she was a Queen, holding her circle."

Everyone had gathered round Mme. de Villeparisis to watch her painting.

"Those flowers are a truly celestial pink," said Legrandin, "I should say sky-pink. For there is such a thing as sky-pink just as there is sky-blue. But," he lowered his voice in the hope that he would not be heard by anyone but the Marquise, "I think I shall still give my vote to the silky, living flesh tint of your rendering of them. You leave Pisanello and Van Huysun a long way behind, with their laborious, dead herbals."

An artist, however modest, is always willing to hear himself preferred to his rivals, and tries only to see that justice is done them.

"What makes you think that is that they painted the flowers of their period, which we don't have now, but they did it with great skill."

"Ah! The flowers of their period! That is a most ingenious theory," exclaimed Legrandin.

"I see you're painting some fine cherry blossoms—or are they mayflowers?" began the historian of the Fronde, not without hesitation as to the flower, but with a note of confidence in his voice, for he was beginning to forget the incident of the hats.

"No; they're apple blossom," said the Duchesse de Guermantes, addressing her aunt.

"Ah! I see you're a good countrywoman like me; you can tell one flower from another."

"Why yes, so they are! But I thought the season for apple blossom was over now," said the historian, seeking wildly to cover his mistake.

"Oh dear, no; far from it, it's not out yet; the trees won't be in blossom for another fortnight, not for three weeks perhaps," said the librarian who, since he helped with the management of Mme. de Villeparisis's estates, was better informed upon country matters.

"At least three weeks," put in the Duchess; "even round Paris, where they're very far forward. Down in Normandy, don't you know, at his father's place," she went on, pointing to the young Duc de Châtellerault, "where they have some splendid apple trees close to the seashore, like a Japanese screen, they're never really pink until after the twentieth of May."

"I never see them," said the young Duke, "because they give me hay fever. Such a bore."

"Hay fever? I never heard of that before," said the historian.

"It's the fashionable complaint just now," the librarian informed him.

"That all depends, you won't get it at all, probably, if it's a good year for apples. You know Le Normand's saying: 'When it's a good year for apples . . .'," put in M. d'Argencourt who, not being really French, was always trying to give himself a Parisian air.

"You're quite right," Mme. de Villeparisis told her niece, "these are from the South. It was a florist who sent them round and asked me to accept them as a present. You're surprised, I dare say, Monsieur Valmère," she turned to the librarian, "that a florist should make me a present of apple blossom. Well, I may be an old woman, but I'm not quite on the shelf yet, I have still a few friends," she went on with a smile that might have been taken as a sign of her simple nature but meant rather, I could not help feeling, that she thought it effective to pride herself on the friendship of a mere florist when she moved in such distinguished circles.

Bloch rose and went over to look at the flowers which Mme. de Villeparisis was painting.

"Never mind, Marquise," said the historian, sitting down again, "even though we should have another of those Revolutions which have stained so many pages of our history with blood—and, upon my soul, in these days one can never tell," he added, with a circular and circumspect glance, as though to make sure that there was no 'disaffected' person in the room, though he had not the least suspicion that there actually was, "with a talent like yours and your five languages you would be certain to get on all right." The historian of the Fronde was feeling quite refreshed, for he had forgotten his insomnia. But he suddenly remembered that he had not slept for the last six nights, whereupon a crushing weariness, born of his mind, paralysed his limbs, made him bow his shoulders, and his melancholy face began to droop like an old man's.

Bloch tried to express his admiration in an appropriate gesture, but only succeeded in knocking over with his elbow the glass containing the spray of apple blossom, and all the water was spilled on the carpet.

"Really, you have the fingers of a fairy," went on (to the Marquise) the historian who, having his back turned to me at that moment, had not noticed Bloch's clumsiness.

But Bloch took this for a sneer at himself, and to cover his shame in insolence retorted: "It's not of the slightest importance; I'm not wet."

Mme. de Villeparisis rang the bell and a footman came to wipe the carpet and pick up the fragments of glass. She invited the two young men to her theatricals, and also Mme. de Guermantes, with the injunction:

"Remember to tell Gisèle and Berthe" (the Duchesses d'Auberjon and de Portefin) "to be here a little before two to help me," as she might have told the hired waiters to come early to arrange the tables.

She treated her princely relatives, as she treated M. de Norpois, without any of the little courtesies which she shewed to the historian, Cottard, Bloch and myself, and they seemed to have no interest for her beyond the possibility of serving them up as food for our social curiosity. This was because she knew that she need not put herself out to entertain people for whom she was not a more or less brilliant woman but the touchy old sister—who needed and received tactful handling—of their father or uncle. There would have been no object in her trying to shine before them, she could never have deceived them as to the strength and weakness of her position, for they knew (none so well) her whole history and respected the illustrious race from which she sprang. But, above all, they had ceased to be anything more for her than a dead stock which would not bear fruit again, they would not let her know their new friends, or share their pleasures. She could obtain from them only their occasional presence, or the possibility of speaking of them, at her five o'clock tea-parties as, later on, in her *Memoirs,* of which these parties were only a sort of rehearsal, a preliminary reading aloud of the manuscript before a selected audience. And the society which all these noble kinsmen and kinswomen served to interest, to dazzle, to enthral, the society of the Cottards, of the Blochs, of the dramatists who were in the public eye at the moment, of the historians of the Fronde and such matters; it was in this society that there existed for Mme. de Villeparisis—failing that section of the fashionable world which did not call upon her—the movement, the novelty, all the entertainment of life, it was from people like these that she was able to derive social benefits (which made it well worth her while to let them meet, now and then, though without ever coming to know her, the Duchesse de Guermantes), dinners with remarkable men whose work had interested her, a light opera or a pantomime staged complete by its author in her drawing-room, boxes for interesting shows. Bloch got up to go. He had said aloud that the incident of the broken flower-glass was of no importance, but what he said to himself was different, more different still what he thought: "If people can't train their servants to put flowers where they won't be knocked over and wet their guests and probably cut their hands, it's much better not to go in for such luxuries," he muttered angrily. He was one of those susceptible, highly strung persons who cannot bear to think of themselves as having made a blunder which, though they do not admit even to themselves that they have made it, is enough to spoil their whole day. In a black rage, he was just making up his mind never to go into society again. He had reached the point at which some distraction was imperative. Fortunately in another minute Mme. de Villeparisis was to press him to stay. Either because she was aware of the general feeling among her friends, and had noticed the tide of anti-semitism that was beginning to rise, or simply from carelessness, she had not introduced him to any of the people in the room. He, however, being little used to society, felt bound before leaving the room to take leave of them all, to shew his manners, but without any friendliness; he lowered his head several times, buried his bearded chin in his collar, scrutinised each of the party in turn through his glasses with a cold, dissatisfied glare. But Mme. de Villeparisis stopped him; she had still to discuss with him the little play which was to be performed in her house, and also she did not wish him to leave before he had had the pleasure of meeting M. de Norpois (whose failure to appear puzzled her), although as an inducement to Bloch this introduction was quite superfluous, he having already decided to persuade the two actresses whose names he had mentioned to her to come and sing for nothing in the Marquise's drawing-room, to enhance their own reputations, at one of those parties to which all that was best and noblest in Europe thronged. He had even offered her, in addition, a tragic actress 'with pure eyes, fair as Hera,' who would recite lyrical prose with a sense of plastic beauty. But on hearing this lady's name Mme. de Villeparisis had declined, for it was that of Saint-Loup's mistress.

"I have better news," she murmured in my ear. "I really believe he's quite cooled off now, and that before very long they'll be parted—in spite of an officer who has played an abominable part in the whole business," she added. For Robert's family were beginning to look with a deadly hatred on M. de Borodino, who had given him leave, at the hairdresser's instance, to go to Bruges, and accused him of giving countenance to an infamous intrigue. "It's really too bad of him," said Mme. de Villeparisis with that virtuous accent common to all the Guermantes, even the most depraved. "Too, too bad," she repeated, giving the word a trio of t's. One felt that she had no doubt of the Prince's being present at all their orgies. But, as kindness of heart was the old lady's dominant quality, her expression of frowning severity towards the horrible captain, whose name she articulated with an ironical emphasis: "The Prince de Borodino!"—speaking as a woman for whom the Empire simply did not count, melted into a gentle smile at myself with a mechanical twitch of the eyelid indicating a vague understanding between us.

"I have a great admiration for de Saint-Loup-en-Bray," said Bloch, "dirty dog as he is, because he's so extremely well-bred. I have a great admiration, not for him but for well-bred people, they're so rare," he went on, without thinking, since he was himself so extremely ill-bred, what offence his words were giving. "I will give you an example which I consider most striking of his perfect breeding. I met him once with a young gentleman just as he was about to spring into his wheelèd chariot, after he himself had buckled their splendid harness on a pair of steeds, whose mangers were heaped with oats and barley, who had no need of the flashing whip to urge them on. He introduced us, but I did not catch the gentleman's name; one never does catch people's names when one's introduced to them," he explained with a laugh, this being one of his father's witticisms. "De Saint-Loup-en-Bray was perfectly calm, made no fuss about the young gentleman, seemed absolutely at his ease. Well, I found out, by pure chance, a day or two later, that the young gentleman was the son of Sir Rufus Israels!"

The end of this story sounded less shocking than its preface, for it remained quite incomprehensible to everyone in the room. The fact was that Sir Rufus Israels, who seemed to Bloch and his father an almost royal personage before whom Saint-Loup ought to tremble, was in the eyes of the Guermantes world a foreign upstart, tolerated in society, on whose friendship nobody would ever have dreamed of priding himself, far from it.

"I learned this," Bloch informed us, "from the person who holds Sir Rufus's power of attorney; he is a friend of my father, and quite an extraordinary man. Oh, an absolutely wonderful individual," he assured us with that affirmative energy, that note of enthusiasm which one puts only into those convictions that did not originate with oneself.

"Tell me," Bloch went on, lowering his voice, to myself, "how much do you suppose Saint-Loup has? Not that it matters to me in the least, you quite understand, don't you. I'm interested from the Balzacian point of view. You don't happen to know what it's in, French stocks, foreign stocks, or land or what?"

I could give him no information whatsoever. Suddenly raising his voice, Bloch asked if he might open the windows, and without waiting for an answer, went across the room to do so. Mme. de Villeparisis protested that he must not, that she had a cold. "Of course, if it's bad for you!" Bloch was downcast. "But you can't say it's not hot in here." And breaking into a laugh he put into the gaze with which he swept the room an appeal for support against Mme. de Villeparisis. He received none, from these well-bred people. His blazing eyes, having failed to seduce any of the guests from their allegiance, faded with resignation to their normal gravity of expression; he acknowledged his defeat with: "What's the temperature? Seventy-two, at least, I should say. I'm not surprised. I'm simply dripping. And I have not, like the sage Antenor, son of the river Alpheus, the power to plunge myself in the paternal wave to stanch my sweat before laying my body in a bath of polished marble and anointing my limbs with fragrant oils." And with that need which people feel to outline for the use of others medical theories the application of which would be beneficial to their own health: "Well, if you believe it's good for you! I must say, I think you're quite wrong. It's exactly what gives you your cold."

Bloch was overjoyed at the idea of meeting M. de Norpois. He would like, he told us, to get him to talk about the Dreyfus case. "There's a mentality at work there which I don't altogether understand, and it would be quite sensational to get an interview out of this eminent diplomat," he said in a tone of sarcasm, so as not to appear to be rating himself below the Ambassador.

Mme. de Villeparisis was sorry that he had said this so loud, but minded less when she saw that the librarian, whose strong Nationalist views kept her, so to speak, on leash, was too far off to have overheard. She was more shocked to hear Bloch, led on by that demon of ill-breeding which made him permanently blind to the consequences of what he said, inquiring, with a laugh at the paternal pleasantry: "Haven't I read a learned treatise by him in which he sets forth a string of irrefutable arguments to prove that the Japanese war was bound to end in a Russian victory and a Japanese defeat? He's fairly paralytic now, isn't he? I'm sure he's the old boy I've seen taking aim at his chair before sliding across the room to it, as if he was on wheels."

"Oh, dear, no! Not in the least like that! Just wait a minute," the Marquise went on, "I don't know what he can be doing."

She rang the bell and, when the servant had appeared, as she made no secret, and indeed liked to advertise the fact that her old friend spent the greater part of his time in her house: "Go and tell M. de Norpois to come in," she ordered him, "he is sorting some papers in my library; he said he would be twenty minutes, and I've been waiting now for an hour and three-quarters. He will tell you about the Dreyfus case, anything you want to know," she said gruffly to Bloch. "He doesn't approve much of the way things are going."

For M. de Norpois was not on good terms with the Government of the day, and Mme. de Villeparisis, although he had never taken the liberty of bringing any actual Ministers to her house (she still preserved all the unapproachable dignity of a great lady, and remained outside and above the political relations which he was obliged to cultivate), was kept well informed by him of everything that went on. Then, too, the politicians of the day would never have dared to ask M. de Norpois to introduce them to Mme. de Villeparisis. But several of them had gone down to see him at her house in the country when they needed his advice or help at critical conjectures. One knew the address. One went to the house. One did not see its mistress. But at dinner that evening she would say:

"I hear they've been down here bothering you. I trust things are going better."

"You are not in a hurry?" she now asked Bloch.

"No, not at all. I wanted to go because I am not very well; in fact there is some talk of my taking a cure at Vichy for my biliary ducts," he explained, articulating the last words with a fiendish irony.

"Why, that's where my nephew Châtellerault's got to go, you must fix it up together. Is he still in the room? He's a nice boy, you know," said Mme. de Villeparisis, and may quite well have meant what she said, feeling that two people whom she knew had no reason not to be friends with each other.

"Oh, I dare say he wouldn't care about that—I don't really know him—at least I barely know him. He is sitting over there," stammered Bloch in ecstasy of confusion.

The butler could not have delivered his mistress's message properly, for M. de Norpois, to make believe that he had just come in from the street, and had not yet seen his hostess, had picked up the first hat that he had found in the hall, and came forward to kiss Mme. de Villeparisis's hand with great ceremony, asking after her health with all the interest that people shew after a long separation. He was not aware that the Marquise had already destroyed any semblance of reality in this charade, which she cut short by taking M. de Norpois and Bloch into an adjoining room. Bloch, who had observed all the courtesy that was being shewn to a person whom he had not yet discovered to be M. de Norpois, had said to me, trying to seem at his ease: "Who is that old idiot?" Perhaps, too, all this bowing and scraping by M. de Norpois had really shocked the better element in Bloch's nature, the freer and more straightforward manners of a younger generation, and he was partly sincere in condemning it as absurd. However that might be, it ceased to appear absurd, and indeed delighted him the moment it was himself, Bloch, to whom the salutations were addressed.

"Monsieur l'Ambassadeur," said Mme. de Villeparisis, "I should like you to know this gentleman. Monsieur Bloch, Monsieur le Marquis de Norpois." She made a point, despite her casual usage of M. de Norpois, of addressing him always as "Monsieur l'Ambassadeur," as a social convention as well as from an exaggerated respect for his Ambassadorial rank, a respect which the Marquis had inculcated in her, and also with an instinctive application to him of the special manner, less familiar and more ceremonious, in relation to one particular man which, in the house of a distinguished woman, in contrast to the liberties that she takes with her other guests, marks that man out instantly as her lover.

M. de Norpois drowned his azure gaze in his white beard, bent his tall body deep down as though he were bowing before all the famous and (to him) imposing connotations of the name Bloch, and murmured: "I am delighted . . ." whereat his young listener, moved, but feeling that the illustrious diplomat was going too far, hastened to correct him, saying: "Not at all! On the contrary, it is I who am delighted." But this ceremony, which M. de Norpois, in his friendship for Mme. de Villeparisis, repeated for the benefit of every fresh person that his old friend introduced to him, did not seem to her adequate to the deserts of Bloch, to whom she said:

"Just ask him anything you want to know; take him into the other room if it's more convenient; he will be delighted to talk to you. I think you wished to speak to him about the Dreyfus case," she went on, no more considering whether this would suit M. de Norpois than she would have thought of asking leave of the Duchesse de Montmorency's portrait before having it lighted up for the historian, or of the tea before pouring it into a cup.

"You must speak loud," she warned Bloch, "he's a little deaf, but he will tell you anything you want to know; he knew Bismarck very well, and Cavour. That is so, isn't it;" she raised her voice, "you knew Bismarck well?"

"Have you got anything on the stocks?" M. de Norpois asked me with a knowing air as he shook my hand warmly. I took the opportunity to relieve him politely of the hat which he had felt obliged to bring ceremonially into the room, for I saw that it was my own which he had inadvertently taken. "You shewed me a somewhat laboured little thing in which you went in for a good deal of hair-splitting. I gave you my opinion quite frankly; what you had written was literally not worth the trouble of putting it on paper: Are you thinking of letting us have anything else? You were greatly smitten with Bergotte, if I remember rightly." "You're not to say anything against Bergotte," put in the Duchess. "I don't dispute his talent as a painter; no one would, Duchess. He understands all about etching, if not brush-work on a large scale like M. Cherbuliez. But it seems to me that in these days we have a tendency to confuse the arts, and forget that the novelist's business is rather to weave a plot and edify his readers than to fiddle away at producing a frontispiece or tailpiece in drypoint. I shall be seeing your father on Sunday at our good friend A. J.'s," he went on, turning again to myself.

I had hoped for a moment, when I saw him talking to Mme. de Guermantes, that he would perhaps afford me, for getting myself asked to her house, the help he had refused me for getting to Mme. Swann's. "Another of my great favourites," I told him, "is Elstir. It seems the Duchesse de Guermantes has some wonderful examples of his work, particularly that admirable *Bunch of Radishes* which I remember at the Exhibition and should so much like to see again; what a masterpiece that is!" And indeed, if I had been a prominent person and had been asked to state what picture I liked best, I should have named this *Bunch of Radishes*. "A masterpiece?" cried M. de Norpois with a surprised and reproachful air. "It makes no pretence of being even a picture, it is merely a sketch." (He was right.) "If you label a clever little thing of that sort 'masterpiece,' what have you got to say about Hébert's *Virgin* or Dagnan-Bouveret?"

"I heard you refusing to let him bring Robert's woman," said Mme. de Guermantes to her aunt, after Bloch had taken the Ambassador aside. "I don't think you'll miss much, she's a perfect horror, as you know, without a vestige of talent, and besides she's grotesquely ugly."

"Do you mean to say, you know her, Duchess?" asked M. d'Argencourt.

"Yes, didn't you know that she performed in my house before the whole of Paris, not that that's anything for me to be proud of," explained Mme. de Guermantes with a laugh, glad nevertheless, since the actress was under discussion, to let it be known that she herself had had the first fruits of her foolishness. "Hallo, I suppose I ought to be going now," she added, without moving.

She had just seen her husband enter the room, and these words were an allusion to the absurdity of their appearing to be paying a call together, like a newly married couple, rather than to the often strained relations that existed between her and the enormous fellow she had married, who, despite his increasing years, still led the life of a gay bachelor. Ranging over the considerable party that was gathered round the tea-table the genial, cynical gaze—dazzled a little by the brightness of the setting sun—of the little round pupils lodged in the exact centre of his eyes, like the 'bulls' which the excellent marksman that he was could always hit with such perfect aim and precision, the Duke came forward with a bewildered cautious slowness as though, alarmed by so brilliant a gathering, he was afraid of treading on ladies' skirts and interrupting conversations. A permanent smile —suggesting a 'Good King of Yvetot'—slightly pompous, a half-open hand floating like a shark's fin by his side, which he allowed to be vaguely clasped by his old friends and by the strangers who were introduced to him, enabled him, without his having to make a single movement, or to interrupt his genial, lazy, royal progress, to reward the assiduity of them all by simply murmuring: "How do, my boy; how do, my dear friend; charmed, Monsieur Bloch; how do, Argencourt;" and, on coming to myself, who was the most highly favoured, when he had been told my name: "How do, my young neighbour, how's your father? What a splendid fellow he is!" He made no great demonstration except to Mme. de Villeparisis, who gave him good-day with a nod of her head, drawing one hand from a pocket of her little apron.

Being formidably rich in a world where everyone was steadily growing poorer, and having secured the permanent attachment to his person of the idea of this enormous fortune, he displayed all the vanity of the great nobleman reinforced by that of the man of means, the refinement and breeding of the former just managing to control the latter's self-sufficiency. One could understand, moreover, that his success with women, which made his wife so unhappy, was not due merely to his name and fortune, for he was still extremely good looking, and his profile retained the purity, the firmness of outline of a Greek god's.

"Do you mean to tell me she performed in your house?" M. d'Argencourt asked the Duchess.

"Well, don't you see, she came to recite, with a bunch of lilies in her hand, and more lilies on her *dress*." Mme. de Guermantes shared her aunt's affectation of pronouncing certain words in an exceedingly rustic fashion, but never rolled her r's like Mme. de Villeparisis.

Before M. de Norpois, under constraint from his hostess, had taken Bloch into the little recess where they could talk more freely, I went up to the old diplomat for a moment and put in a word about my father's Academic chair. He tried first of all to postpone the conversation to another day. I pointed out that I was going to Balbec. "What? Going again to Balbec? Why, you're a regular globe-trotter." He listened to what I had to say. At the name of Leroy-Beaulieu, he looked at me suspiciously. I conjectured that he had perhaps said something disparaging to M. Leroy-Beaulieu about my father and was afraid of the economist's having repeated it to him. All at once he seemed animated by a positive affection for my father. And after one of those opening hesitations out of which suddenly a word explodes as though in spite of the speaker, whose irresistible conviction prevails over his half-hearted efforts at silence: "No, no," he said to me with emotion, "your father *must not* stand. In his own interest he must not; it is not fair to himself; he owes a certain respect to his own really great merits, which would be compromised by such an adventure. He is too big a man for that. If he should be elected, he will have everything to lose and nothing to gain. He is not an orator, thank heaven. And that is the one thing that counts with my dear colleagues, even if you only talk platitudes. Your father has an important goal in life; he should march straight ahead towards it, and not allow himself to turn aside to beat bushes, even the bushes (more thorny for that matter than flowery) of the grove of Academe. Besides, he would not get many votes. The Academy likes to keep a postulant waiting for some time before taking him to its bosom. For the present, there is nothing to be done. Later on, I don't say. But he must wait until the Society itself comes in quest of him. It makes a practice, not a very fortunate practice, a fetish rather, of the *farà da sè* of our friends across the Alps. Leroy-Beaulieu spoke to me about all this in a way I did not at all like. I pointed out to him, a little sharply perhaps, that a man accustomed as he is to dealing with colonial imports and metals could not be expected to understand the part played by the imponderables, as Bismarck used to say. But, whatever happens, your father must on no account put himself forward as a candidate. *Principis obsta.* His friends would find themselves placed in a delicate position if he suddenly called upon them for their votes. Indeed," he broke forth, with an air of candour, fixing his blue eyes on my face, "I am going to say a thing that you will be surprised to hear coming from me, who am so fond of your father. Well, simply because I am fond of him (we are known as the inseparables—*Arcades ambo*), simply because I know the immense service that he can still render to his country, the reefs from which he can steer her if he remains at the helm; out of affection, out of high regard for him, out of patriotism, I should not vote for him. I fancy, moreover, that I have given him to understand that I should not." (I seemed to discern in his eyes the stern Assyrian profile of Leroy-Beaulieu.) "So that to give him my vote now would be a sort of recantation on my part." M. de Norpois repeatedly dismissed his brother Academicians as old fossils. Other reasons apart, every member of a club or academy likes to ascribe to his fellow members the type of character that is the direct converse of his own, less for the advantage of being able to say: "Ah! If it only rested with me!" than for the satisfaction of making the election which he himself has managed to secure seem more difficult, a greater distinction. "I may tell you," he concluded, "that in the best interests of you all, I should prefer to see your father triumphantly elected in ten or fifteen years' time." Words which I assumed to have been dictated if not by jealousy, at any rate by an utter lack of any willingness to oblige, and which later on I was to recall when the course of events had given them a different meaning.

"You haven't thought of giving the Institute an address on the price of bread during the Fronde, I suppose," the historian of that movement timidly inquired of M. de Norpois. "You could make a considerable success of a subject like that," (which was to say, "you would give me a colossal advertisement,") he added, smiling at the Ambassador pusillanimously, but with a warmth of feeling which made him raise his eyelids and expose a double horizon of eye. I seemed to have seen this look before, and yet I had met the historian for the first time this afternoon. Suddenly I remembered having seen the same expression in the eyes of a Brazilian doctor who claimed to be able to cure choking fits of the kind from which I suffered by some absurd inhalation of the essential oils of plants. When, in the hope that he would pay more attention to my case, I had told him that I knew Professor Cottard, he had replied, as though speaking in Cottard's interest: "Now this treatment of mine, if you were to tell him about it, would give him the material for a most sensational paper for the Academy of Medicine!" He had not ventured to press the matter but had stood gazing at me with the same air of interrogation, timid, anxious, appealing, which it had just puzzled me to see on the face of the historian of the

Fronde. Obviously the two men were not acquainted and had little or nothing in common, but psychological like physical laws have a more or less general application. And the requisite conditions are the same; an identical expression lights the eyes of different human animals, as a single sunrise lights different places, a long way apart, which have no connexion with one another. I did not hear the Ambassador's reply, for the whole party, with a good deal of noise, had again gathered round Mme. de Villeparisis to watch her at work.

"You know who' we're talking about, Basin?" the Duchess asked her husband.

"I can make a pretty good guess," said the Duke.

"Ah! As an actress she's not, I'm afraid, in what one would call the great tradition."

"You can't imagine," went on Mme. de Guermantes to M. d'Argencourt, "anything more ridiculous."

"In fact, it was drolatic," put in M. de Guermantes, whose odd vocabulary enabled people in society to declare that he was no fool and literary people, at the same time, to regard him as a complete imbecile.

"What I fail to understand," resumed the Duchess, "is how in the world Robert ever came to fall in love with her. Oh, of course I know one mustn't discuss that sort of thing," she added, with the charming pout of a philosopher and sentimentalist whose last illusion had long been shattered. "I know that anybody may fall in love with anybody else. And," she went on, for, though she might still laugh at modern literature, it, either by its dissemination through the popular press or else in the course of conversation, had begun to percolate into her mind, "that is the really nice thing about love, because it's what makes it so 'mysterious.' "

"Mysterious! Oh, I must confess, cousin, that's a bit beyond me," said the Comte d'Argencourt.

"Oh dear, yes, it's a very mysterious thing, love," declared the Duchess, with the sweet smile of a good-natured woman of the world, but also with the rooted conviction with which a Wagnerian assures a bored gentleman from the Club that there is something more than just noise in the *Walküre*. "After all, one never does know what makes one person fall in love with another; it may not be at all what we think," she added with a smile, repudiating at once by this interpretation the idea she had just suggested. "After all, one never knows anything, does one?" she concluded with an air of weary scepticism. "Besides, one understands, doesn't one; one simply can't explain other people's choices in love."

But having laid down this principle she proceeded at once to abandon it and to criticise Saint-Loup's choice.

"All the same, don't you know, it is amazing to me that a man can find any attraction in a person who's simply silly."

Bloch, hearing Saint-Loup's name mentioned and gathering that he was in Paris, promptly made a remark about him so outrageous that everybody was shocked. He was beginning to nourish hatreds, and one felt that he would stop at nothing to gratify them. Once he had established the principle that he himself was of great moral worth and that the sort of people who frequented La Boulie (an athletic club which he supposed to be highly fashionable) deserved penal servitude, every blow he could get in against them seemed to him praiseworthy. He went so far once as to speak of a lawsuit which he was anxious to bring against one of his La Boulie friends. In the course of the trial he proposed to give certain evidence which would be entirely untrue, though the defendant would be unable to impugn his veracity. In this way Bloch (who, incidentally, never put his plan into action) counted on baffling and infuriating his antagonist. What harm could there be in that, since he whom he sought to injure was a man who thought only of doing the 'right thing,' a La Boulie man, and against people like that any weapon was justified, especially in the hands of a Saint, such as Bloch himself?

"I say, though, what about Swann?" objected M. d'Argencourt, who having at last succeeded in understanding the point of his cousin's speech, was impressed by her accuracy of observation, and was racking his brains for instances of men who had fallen in love with women in whom he himself had seen no attraction.

"Oh, but Swann's case was quite different," the Duchess protested. "It was a great surprise, I admit, because she's just a well-meaning idiot, but she was never silly, and she was at one time good looking."

"Oh, oh!" muttered Mme. de Villeparisis.

"You never thought so? Surely, she had some charming points, very fine eyes, good hair, she used to dress, and does still dress, wonderfully. Nowadays, I quite agree, she's horrible, but she has been a lovely woman in her time. Not that that made me any less sorry when Charles married her, because it was so unnecessary." The Duchess had not intended to say anything out of the common, but as M. d'Argencourt began to laugh she repeated these last words—either because she thought them amusing or because she thought it nice of him to laugh—and looked up at him with a coaxing smile, to add the enchantment of her femininity to that of her wit. She went on: "Yes, really, it wasn't worth the trouble, was it; still, after all, she did have some charm and I can quite understand anybody's falling in love with her, but if you saw Robert's girl, I assure you, you'd simply die of laughter. Oh, I know somebody's going to quote Augier at me: 'What matters the bottle so long as one gets drunk?' Well, Robert may have got drunk, all right, but he certainly hasn't shewn much taste in his choice of a bottle! First of all, would you believe that she actually expected me to fit up a staircase right in the middle of my drawing-room. Oh, a mere nothing—what?—and she announced that she was going to lie flat on her stomach on the steps. And then, if you'd heard the things she recited, I only remember one scene, but I'm sure nobody could imagine anything like it; it was called the *Seven Princesses*."

"*Seven Princesses!* Dear, dear, what a snob she must be!" cried M. d'Argencourt. "But, wait a minute, why, I know the whole play. The author sent a copy to the King, who couldn't understand a word of it and called on me to explain it to him."

"It isn't by any chance, from the Sar Peladan?" asked the historian of the Fronde, meaning to make a subtle and topical allusion, but in so low a tone that his question passed unnoticed.

"So you know the *Seven Princesses,* do you?" replied the Duchess. "I congratulate you! I only know one, but she's quite enough; I have no wish to make the acquaintance of the other six. If they are all like the one I've seen!"

"What a goose!" I thought to myself. Irritated by the coldness of her greeting, I found a sort of bitter satisfaction in this proof of her complete inability to understand Maeterlinck. "To think that's the woman I walk miles every morning to see. Really, I'm too kind. Well, it's my turn now not to want to see her." Thus I reasoned with myself; but my words ran counter to my thoughts; they were purely conversational words such as we say to ourselves at those moments when, too much excited to remain quietly alone, we feel the need, for want of another listener, to talk to ourselves, without meaning what we say, as we talk to a stranger.

"I can't tell you what it was like," the Duchess went on; "you simply couldn't help laughing. Not that anyone tried; rather the other way, I'm sorry to say, for the young person was not at all pleased and Robert has never really forgiven me. Though I can't say I'm sorry, actually, because if it had been a success the lady would perhaps have come again, and I don't quite see Marie-Aynard approving of that."

This was the name given in the family to Robert's mother, Mme. de Marsantes, the widow of Aynard de Saint-Loup, to distinguish her from her cousin, the Princesse de Guermantes-Bavière, also a Marie, to whose Christian name her nephews and cousins and brothers-in-law added, to avoid confusion, either that of her husband or another of her own, making her Marie-Gilbert or Marie-Hedwige.

"To begin with, there was a sort of rehearsal the night before, which was a wonderful affair!" went on Mme. de Guermantes in ironical pursuit of her theme. "Just imagine, she uttered a sentence, no, not so much, not a quarter of a sentence, and then she stopped; she didn't open her mouth—I'm not exaggerating—for a good five minutes."

"Oh, I say," cried M. d'Argencourt.

"With the utmost politeness I took the liberty of hinting to her that this might seem a little unusual. And she said—I give you her actual words—'One ought always to repeat a thing as though one were just composing it oneself.' When you think of it, that really is monumental."

"But I understood she wasn't at all bad at reciting poetry," said one of the two young men.

"She hasn't the ghost of a notion what poetry is," replied Mme. de Guermantes. "However, I didn't need to listen to her to tell that. It was quite enough to see her come in with her lilies. I knew at once that she couldn't have any talent when I saw those lilies!"

Everybody laughed.

"I hope, my dear aunt, you aren't angry with me, over my little joke the other day about the Queen of Sweden. I've come to ask your forgiveness."

"Oh, no, I'm not at all angry, I even give you leave to eat at my table, if you're hungry.—Come along, M. Valmère, you're the daughter of the house," Mme. de Villeparisis went on to the librarian, repeating a time-honoured pleasantry.

M. de Guermantes sat upright in the armchair in which he had come to anchor, his hat on the carpet by his side, and examined with a satisfied smile the plate of little cakes that was being held out to him.

"Why, certainly, now that I am beginning to feel at home in this distinguished company, I will take a sponge-cake; they look excellent."

"This gentleman makes you an admirable daughter," commented M. d'Argencourt, whom the spirit of imitation prompted to keep Mme. de Villeparisis's little joke in circulation.

The librarian handed the plate of cakes to the historian of the Fronde.

"You perform your functions admirably," said the latter, startled into speech, and hoping also to win the sympathy of the crowd. At the same time he cast a covert glance of connivance at those who had anticipated him.

"Tell me, my dear aunt," M. de Guermantes inquired of Mme. de Villeparisis, "who was that rather good-looking man who was going out just now as I came in? I must know him, because he gave me a sweeping bow, but I couldn't place him at all; you know I never can remember names, it's such a nuisance," he added, in a tone of satisfaction.

"M. Legrandin."

"Oh, but Oriane has a cousin whose mother, if I'm not mistaken, was a Grandin. Yes, I remember quite well, she was a Grandin de l'Epervier."

"No," replied Mme. de Villeparisis, "no relation at all. These are plain Grandins. Grandins of nothing at all. But they'd be only too glad to be Grandins of anything you chose to name. This one has a sister called Mme. de Cambremer."

"Why, Basin, you know quite well who' my aunt means," cried the Duchess indignantly. "He's the brother of that great graminivorous creature you had the weird idea of sending to call on me the other day. She stayed a solid hour; I thought I should go mad. But I began by thinking it was she who was mad when I saw a person I didn't know come browsing into the room looking exactly like a cow."

"Listen, Oriane; she asked me what afternoon you were at home; I couldn't very well be rude to her; and besides, you do exaggerate so, she's not in the least like a cow," he added in a plaintive tone, though not without a quick smiling glance at the audience.

He knew that his wife's lively wit needed the stimulus of contradiction, the contradiction of common sense which protests that one cannot (for instance) mistake a woman seriously for a cow; by this process Mme. de Guermantes, enlarging upon her original idea, had been inspired to produce many of her most brilliant sayings. And the Duke in his innocent fashion helped her, without seeming to do so, to bring off her effects like, in a railway carriage, the unacknowledged partner of the three-card player.

"I admit she doesn't look like *a* cow, she looks like a dozen," exclaimed Mme. de Guermantes. "I assure you, I didn't know what to do when I saw a herd of cattle come marching into my drawing-room in a hat and heard them ask me how I was. I had half a mind to say: 'Please, herd of cattle, you must be making a mistake, you can't possibly know me, because you're a herd of cattle,' but after racking my brains over her I came to the conclusion that your Cambremer woman must be the Infanta Dorothea, who had said she was coming to see me one day, and is rather bovine also, so that I was just on the point of saying: 'Your Royal Highness' and using the third person to a herd of cattle. The cut of her dewlap reminded me rather, too, of the Queen of Sweden. But this massed attack had been prepared for by long range artillery fire, according to all the rules of war. For I don't know how long before, I was bombarded with her cards; I used to find them lying about all over the house, on all the tables and chairs, like prospectuses. I couldn't think what they were supposed to be advertising. You saw nothing in the house but 'Marquis et Marquise de Cambremer' with some address or other which I've forgotten; you may be quite sure nothing will ever take me there."

"But it's a great distinction to look like a Queen," said the historian of the Fronde.

"Gad, sir, Kings and Queens, in these days, don't amount to much," said M. de Guermantes, partly because he liked to be thought broad-minded and modern, and also so as not to seem to attach any importance to his own royal friendships, which he valued highly.

Bloch and M. de Norpois had returned from the other room and came towards us.

"Well, sir," asked Mme. de Villeparisis, "have you been talking to him about the Dreyfus case?"

M. de Norpois raised his eyes to the ceiling, but with a smile, as though calling on heaven to witness the monstrosity of the caprices to which his Dulcinea compelled him to submit. Nevertheless he spoke to Bloch with great affability of the terrible, perhaps fatal period through which France was passing. As this presumably meant that M. de Norpois (to whom Bloch had confessed his belief in the innocence of Dreyfus) was an ardent anti-Dreyfusard, the Ambassador's geniality, his air of tacit admission that his listener was in the right, of never doubting that they were both of the same opinion, of being prepared to join forces with him to overthrow the Government, flattered Bloch's vanity and aroused his curiosity. What were the important points which M. de Norpois never specified but on which he seemed implicitly to affirm that he was in agreement with Bloch; what opinion, then, did he hold of the case, that could bring them together? Bloch was all the more astonished at the mysterious unanimity which seemed to exist between him and M. de Norpois, in that it was not confined to politics, Mme. de Villeparisis having spoken at some length to M. de Norpois of Bloch's literary work.

"You are not of your age," the former Ambassador told him, "and I congratulate you upon that. You are not of this age in which disinterested work no longer exists, in which writers offer the public nothing but obscenities or ineptitudes. Efforts such as yours ought to be encouraged, and would be, if we had a Government."

Bloch was flattered by this picture of himself swimming alone amid a universal shipwreck. But here again he would have been glad of details, would have liked to know what were the ineptitudes to which M. de Norpois referred. Bloch had the feeling that he was working along the same lines as plenty of others; he had never supposed himself to be so exceptional. He returned to the Dreyfus case, but did not succeed in elucidating M. de Norpois's own views. He tried to induce him to speak of the officers whose names were appearing constantly in the newspapers at that time; they aroused more curiosity than the politicians who were involved also, because they were not, like the politicians, well known already, but, wearing a special garb, emerging from the obscurity of a different kind of life and a religiously guarded silence, simply stood up and spoke and disappeared again, like Lohengrin landing from a skiff drawn by a swan. Bloch had been able, thanks to a Nationalist lawyer of his acquaintance, to secure admission to several hearings of the Zola trial. He would arrive there in the morning and stay until the court rose, with a packet of sandwiches and a flask of coffee, as though for the final examination for a degree, and this change of routine stimulating a nervous excitement which the coffee and the emotional interest of the trial worked up to a climax, he would come out so enamoured of everything that had happened in court that, in the evening, as he sat at home, he would long to immerse himself again in that beautiful dream and would hurry out, to a restaurant frequented by both parties, in search of friends with whom he would go over interminably the whole of the day's proceedings, and make up, by a supper ordered in an imperious tone which gave him the illusion of power, for the hunger and exhaustion of a day begun so early and unbroken by any interval for luncheon. The human mind, hovering perpetually between the two planes of experience and imagination, seeks to fathom the ideal life of the people it knows and to know the people whose life it has had to imagine. To Bloch's questions M. de Norpois replied:

"There are two officers involved in the case now being tried of whom I remember hearing some time ago from a man in whose judgment I felt great confidence, and who praised them both highly—I mean M. de Miribel. They are Lieutenant-Colonel Henry and Lieutenant-Colonel Picquart."

"But," exclaimed Bloch, "the divine Athena, daughter of Zeus, has put in the mind of one the opposite of what is in the mind of the other. And they are fighting against one another like two lions. Colonel Picquart had a splendid position in the Army, but his Moira has led him to the side that was not rightly his. The sword of the Nationalists will carve his tender flesh, and he will be cast out as food for the beasts of prey and the birds that wax fat upon the bodies of men."

M. de Norpois made no reply.

"What are those two palavering about over there?" M. de Guermantes asked Mme. de Villeparisis, indicating M. de Norpois and Bloch.

"The Dreyfus case."

"The devil they are. By the way, do you know who is a red-hot supporter of Dreyfus? I give you a thousand guesses. My nephew Robert! I can tell you that, at the Jockey, when they heard of his goings on, there was a fine gathering of the clans, a regular hue and cry. And as he's coming up for election next week . . ."

"Of course," broke in the Duchess, "if they're all like Gilbert, who keeps on saying that all the Jews ought to be sent back to Jerusalem."

"Indeed; then the Prince de Guermantes is quite of my way of thinking," put in M. d'Argencourt.

The Duke made a show of his wife, but did not love her. Extremely self-centred, he hated to be interrupted, besides he was in the habit, at home, of treating her brutally. Convulsed with the twofold rage of a bad husband when his wife speaks to him, and a good talker when he is not listened to, he stopped short and transfixed the Duchess with a glare which made everyone feel uncomfortable.

"What makes you think we want to hear about Gilbert and Jerusalem? It's nothing to do with that. But," he went on in a gentler tone, "you will agree that if one of our family were to be pilled at the Jockey, especially Robert, whose father was chairman for ten years, it would be a pretty serious matter. What can you expect, my dear, it's got 'em on the raw, those fellows; they're all over it. I don't blame them, either; personally, you know that I have no racial prejudice, all that sort of thing seems to me out of date, and I do claim to move with the times; but damn it all, when one goes by the name of 'Marquis de Saint-Loup' one isn't a Dreyfusard; what more can I say?"

M. de Guermantes uttered the words: "When one goes by the name of Marquis de Saint-Loup," with some emphasis. He knew very well that it was a far greater thing to go by that of Duc de Guermantes. But if his self-esteem had a tendency to exaggerate if anything the superiority of the title Duc de Guermantes over all others, it was perhaps not so much the rules of good taste as the laws of imagination that urged him thus to attenuate it. Each of us sees in the brightest colours what he sees at a distance, what he sees in other people. For the general laws which govern perspective in imagination apply just as much to dukes as to ordinary mortals. And not only the laws of imagination, but those of speech. Now, either of two laws of speech may apply here, one being that which makes us express ourselves like others of our mental category and not of our caste. Under this law M. de Guermantes might be, in his choice of expressions, even when he wished to talk about the nobility, indebted to the humblest little tradesman, who would have said: "When one goes by the name of Duc de Guermantes," whereas an educated man, a Swann, a Legrandin would not have said it. A duke may write novels worthy of a grocer, even about life in high society, titles and pedigrees being of no help to him there, and the epithet 'aristocratic' be earned by the writings of a plebeian. Who had been, in this instance, the inferior from whom M. de Guermantes had picked up 'when one goes by the name,' he had probably not the least idea. But another law of speech is that, from time to time, as there appear and then vanish diseases of which nothing more is ever heard, there come into being, no one knows how, spontaneously perhaps or by an accident like that which introduced into France a certain weed from America, the seeds of which, caught in the wool of a travelling rug, fell on a railway embankment, forms of speech which one hears in the same decade on the lips of people who have not in any way combined together to use them. So, just as in a certain year I heard Bloch say, referring to himself, that "the most charming people, the most brilliant, the best known, the most exclusive had discovered that there was only one man in Paris whom they felt to be intelligent, pleasant, whom they could not do without—namely Bloch," and heard the same phrase used by countless other young men who did not know him and varied it only by substituting their own names for his, so I was often to hear this 'when one goes by the name.'

"What can one expect," the Duke went on, "with the influence he's come under; it's easy to understand."

"Still it is rather comic," suggested the Duchess, "when you think of his mother's attitude, how she bores us to tears with her Patrie Française, morning, noon and night."

"Yes, but there's not only his mother to be thought of, you can't humbug us like that. There's a damsel, too, a fly-by-night of the worst type; she has far more influence over him than his mother, and she happens to be a compatriot of Master Dreyfus. She has passed on her state of mind to Robert."

"You may not have heard, Duke, that there is a new word to describe that sort of mind," said the librarian, who was Secretary to the Anti-revisionist Committee. "They say 'mentality.' It means exactly the same thing, but it has this advantage that nobody knows what you're talking about. It is the very latest expression just now, the 'last word' as people say." Meanwhile, having heard Bloch's name, he was watching him question M. de Norpois with misgivings which aroused others as strong though of a different order in the Marquise. Trembling before the librarian, and always acting the anti-Dreyfusard in his presence, she dreaded what he would say were he to find out that she had asked to her house a Jew more or less affiliated to the 'Syndicate.'

"Indeed," said the Duke, " 'mentality,' you say; I must make a note of that; I shall use it some day." This was no figure of speech, the Duke having a little pocketbook filled with such 'references' which he used to consult before dinner-parties. "I like 'mentality.' There are a lot of new words like that which people suddenly start using, but they never last. I read somewhere the other day that some writer was 'talentuous.' You may perhaps know what it means; I don't. And since then I've never come across the word again."

"But 'mentality' is more widely used than 'talentuous,' " the historian of the Fronde made his way into the conversation. "I am on a Committee at the Ministry of Education at which I have heard it used several times, as well as at my Club, the Volney, and indeed at dinner at M. Emile Ollivier's."

"I, who have not the honour to belong to the Ministry of Education," replied the Duke with a feigned humility but with a vanity so intense that his lips could not refrain from curving in a smile, nor his eyes from casting round his audience a glance sparkling with joy, the ironical scorn in which made the poor historian blush, "I who have not the honour to belong to the Ministry of Education," he repeated, relishing the sound of his words, "nor to the Volney Club (my only clubs are the Union and the Jockey

—you aren't in the Jockey, I think, sir?" he asked the historian, who, blushing a still deeper red, scenting an insult and failing to understand it, began to tremble in every limb), "I, who am not even invited to dine with M. Emile Ollivier, I must confess that I had never heard 'mentality.' I'm sure you're in the same boat, Argencourt.

"You know," he went on, "why they can't produce the proofs of Dreyfus's guilt. Apparently it's because the War Minister's wife was his mistress, that's what people are saying."

"Ah! I thought it was the Prime Minister's wife," said M. d'Argencourt.

"I think you're all equally tiresome about this wretched case," said the Duchesse de Guermantes, who, in the social sphere, was always anxious to shew that she did not allow herself to be led by anyone. "It can't make any difference to me, so far as the Jews are concerned, for the simple reason that I don't know any of them, and I intend to remain in that state of blissful ignorance. But on the other hand I do think it perfectly intolerable that just because they're supposed to hold 'sound' views and don't deal with Jewish tradesmen, or have 'Down with the Jews' printed on their sunshades, we should have a swarm of Durands and Dubois and so forth, women we should never have known but for this business, forced down our throats by Marie-Aynard or Victurnienne. I went to see Marie-Aynard a couple of days ago. It used to be so nice there. Nowadays one finds all the people one has spent one's life trying to avoid, on the pretext that they're against Dreyfus, and others of whom you have no idea who they can be."

"No; it was the War Minister's wife; at least, that's the bedside rumour," went on the Duke, who liked to flavour his conversation with certain expressions which he imagined to be of the old school. "Personally, of course, as everyone knows, I take just the opposite view to my cousin Gilbert. I am not feudal like him. I would go about with a Negro if he was a friend of mine, and I shouldn't care two straws what anybody thought; still after all you will agree with me that when one goes by the name of Saint-Loup one doesn't amuse oneself by running clean against the rails of public opinion, which has more sense than Voltaire or even my nephew. Nor does one go in for what I may be allowed to call these acrobatics of conscience a week before one comes up for a club. It is a bit stiff, really! No, it is probably that little wench of his that has put him on his high horse. I expect she told him that he would be classed among the 'intellectuals.' The intellectuals, they're the very cream of those gentry. It's given rise, by the way, to a rather amusing pun, though a very naughty one."

And the Duke murmured, lowering his voice, for his wife's and M. d'Argencourt's benefit, "Mater Semita," which had already made its way into the Jockey Club, for, of all the flying seeds in the world, that to which are attached the most solid wings, enabling it to be disseminated at the greatest distance from its parent branch, is still a joke.

"We might ask this gentleman, who has a *nerudite* air, to explain it to us," he went on, indicating the historian. "But it is better not to repeat it, especially as there's not a vestige of truth in the suggestion. I am not so ambitious as my cousin Mirepoix, who claims that she can trace the descent of her family before Christ to the Tribe of Levi, and I will undertake to prove that there has never been a drop of Jewish blood in our family. Still there is no good in our shutting our eyes to the fact, you may be sure that my dear nephew's highly original views are liable to make a considerable stir at Landerneau. Especially as Fezensac is ill just now, and Duras will be running the election; you know how he likes to make nuisances," concluded the Duke, who had never succeeded in learning the exact meaning of certain phrases, and supposed 'making nuisances' to mean 'making difficulties.'

Bloch tried to pin M. de Norpois down on Colonel Picquart.

"There can be no two opinions;" replied M. de Norpois, "his evidence had to be taken. I am well aware that, by maintaining this attitude, I have drawn screams of protest from more than one of my colleagues, but to my mind the Government were bound to let the Colonel speak. One can't dance lightly out of a blind alley like that, or if one does there's always the risk of falling into a ditch. As for the officer himself, his statement gave one, at the first hearing, a most excellent impression. When one saw him, looking so well in that smart Chasseur uniform, come into court and relate in a perfectly simple and frank tone what he had seen and what he had deduced, and say: 'On my honour as a soldier' " (here M. de Norpois's voice shook with a faint patriotic throb) " 'such is my conviction,' it is impossible to deny that the impression he made was profound."

"There; he is a Dreyfusard, there's not the least doubt of it," thought Bloch.

"But where he entirely forfeited all the sympathy that he had managed to attract was when he was confronted with the registrar, Gribelin. When one heard that old public servant, a man who had only one answer to make," (here M. de Norpois began to accentuate his words with the energy of his sincere convictions) "when one listened to him, when one saw him look his superior officer in the face, not afraid to hold his head up to him, and say to him in a tone that admitted of no response: 'Colonel, sir, you know very well that I have never told a lie, you know that at this moment, as always, I am speaking the truth,' the wind changed; M. Picquart might move heaven and earth at the subsequent hearings; he made a complete fiasco."

"No; evidently he's an anti-Dreyfusard; it's quite obvious," said Bloch to himself. "But if he considers Picquart a traitor and a liar, how can he take his revelations seriously, and quote them as if he found them charming and believed them to be sincere. And if, on the other hand, he sees in him an honest man easing his conscience, how can he suppose him to have been lying when he was confronted with Gribelin?"

"In any case, if this man Dreyfus is innocent," the Duchess broke in, "he hasn't done much to prove it. What idiotic, raving letters he writes from that island. I don't know whether M. Esterhazy is any better, but he does shew some skill in his choice of words, a different tone altogether. That can't be very pleasant for the supporters of M. Dreyfus. What a pity for them there's no way of exchanging innocents." Everybody laughed. "You heard what Oriane said?" the Duc de Guermantes inquired eagerly of Mme. de Villeparisis. "Yes; I think it most amusing." This was not enough for the Duke. "Well, I don't know, I can't say that I thought it amusing; or rather it doesn't make the slightest difference to me whether a thing is amusing or not. I don't care about wit." M. d'Argencourt protested. "It is probably because I've been a Member of Parliament, where I have listened to brilliant speeches that meant absolutely nothing. I learned there to value, more than anything, logic. That's probably why they didn't elect me again. Amusing things leave me cold." "Basin, don't play the heavy father like that, my child, you know quite well that no one admires wit more than you do." "Please let me finish. It is just because I am unmoved by a certain type of humour, that I am often struck by my wife's wit. For you will find it based, as a rule, upon sound observation. She reasons like a man; she states her case like a writer."

Possibly the explanation of M. de Norpois's speaking in this way to Bloch, as though they had been in agreement, may have lain in the fact that he himself was so keen an anti-Dreyfusard that, finding the Government not anti-Dreyfusard enough, he was its enemy just as much as the Dreyfusards. Perhaps because the object to which he devoted himself in politics was something more profound, situated on another plane, from which Dreyfusism appeared as an unimportant modality which did not deserve the attention of a patriot interested in large questions of foreign policy. Perhaps, rather, because the maxims of his political wisdom being applicable only to questions of form, of procedure, of expediency, they were as powerless to solve questions of fact as in philosophy pure logic is powerless to tackle the problems of existence; or else because that very wisdom made him see danger in handling such subjects and so, in his caution, he preferred to speak only of minor incidents. But where Bloch made a mistake was in thinking that M. de Norpois, even had he been less cautious by nature and of a less exclusively formal cast of mind, could (supposing he would) have told him the truth as to the part played by Henry, Picquart or du Paty de Clam, or as to any of the different aspects of the case. The truth, indeed, as to all these matters Bloch could not doubt that M. de Norpois knew. How could he fail to know it seeing that he was a friend of all the Ministers? Naturally, Bloch thought that the truth in politics could be approximately reconstructed by the most luminous minds. but he imagined, like the man in the street, that it resided permanently. beyond the reach of argument and in a material form, in the secret files of the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister, who imparted it to their Cabinet. Now, even when a political truth does take the form of written documents, it is seldom that these have any more value than a radiographic plate on which the layman imagines that the patient's disease is inscribed in so many words, when, as a matter of fact, the plate furnishes simply one piece of material for study, to be combined with a number of others, which the doctor's reasoning powers will take into consideration as a whole and upon them found his diagnosis. So, too, the truth in politics, when one goes to well-informed men and imagines that one is about to grasp it, eludes one. Indeed, later on (to confine ourselves to the Dreyfus case), when so startling an event occurred as Henry's confession, followed by his suicide, this fact was at once interpreted in opposite ways by the

Dreyfusard Ministers, and by Cavaignac and Cuignet who had themselves made the discovery of the forgery and conducted the examination; still more so among the Dreyfusard Ministers themselves, men of the same shade of Dreyfusism, judging not only from the same documents but in the same spirit, the part played by Henry was explained in two entirely different ways, one set seeing in him an accomplice of Esterhazy, the others assigning that part to du Paty de Clam, thus rallying in support of a theory of their opponent Cuignet and in complete opposition to their supporter Reinach. All that Bloch could elicit from M. de Norpois was that if it were true that the Chief of Staff, M. de Boisdeffre, had had a secret communication sent to M. Rochefort, it was evident that a singularly regrettable irregularity had occurred.

"You may be quite sure that the War Minister must (*in petto* at any rate) be consigning his Chief of Staff to the infernal powers. An official disclaimer would not have been (to my mind) a work of supererogation. But the War Minister expresses himself very bluntly on the matter *inter pocula*. There are certain subjects, moreover, about which it is highly imprudent to create an agitation over which one cannot retain control afterwards."

"But those documents are obviously forged," put in Bloch.

M. de Norpois made no reply to this, but announced that he did not approve of the manifestations that were being made by Prince Henri d'Orléans.

"Besides, they can only ruffle the calm of the pretorium, and encourage agitations which, looked at from either point of view, would be deplorable. Certainly we must put a stop to the anti-militarist conspiracy, but we cannot possibly tolerate, either, a brawl encouraged by those elements on the Right who instead of serving the patriotic ideal themselves are hoping to make it serve them. Heaven be praised, France is not a South American Republic, and the need has not yet been felt here for a military pronunciamento."

Bloch could not get him to speak on the question of Dreyfus's guilt, nor would he utter any forecast as to the judgment in the civil trial then proceeding. On the other hand, M. de Norpois seemed only too ready to indicate the consequences of this judgment.

"If it is a conviction," he said, "it will probably be quashed, for it is seldom that, in a case where there has been such a number of witnesses, there is not some flaw in the procedure which counsel can raise on appeal. To return to Prince Henri's outburst, I greatly doubt whether it has met with his father's approval."

"You think Chartres is for Dreyfus?" asked the Duchess with a smile, her eyes rounded, her cheeks bright, her nose buried in her plate, her whole manner deliciously scandalised.

"Not at all; I meant only that there runs through the whole family, on that side, a political sense which we have seen, in the admirable Princesse Clémentine, carried to its highest power, and which her son, Prince Ferdinand, has kept as a priceless inheritance. You would never have found the Prince of Bulgaria clasping Major Esterhazy to his bosom."

"He would have preferred a private soldier," murmured Mme. de Guermantes, who often met the Bulgarian monarch at dinner at the Prince de Joinville's, and had said to him once, when he asked if she was not envious: "Yes, Sir, of your bracelets."

"You aren't going to Mme. de Sagan's ball this evening?" M. de Norpois asked Mme. de Villeparisis, to cut short his conversation with Bloch. My friend had not failed to interest the Ambassador, who told us afterwards, not without a quaint simplicity, thinking no doubt of the traces that survived in Bloch's speech of the neo-Homeric manner which he had on the whole outgrown: "He is rather amusing, with that way of speaking, a trifle old fashioned, a trifle solemn. You expect him to come out with 'The Learned Sisters,' like Lamartine or Jean-Baptiste Rousseau. It has become quite uncommon in the youth of the present day, as it was indeed in the generation before them. We ourselves were inclined to be romantic." But however exceptional his companion may have seemed to him, M. de Norpois decided that the conversation had lasted long enough.

"No, sir, I don't go to balls any more," she replied with a charming grandmotherly smile. "You're going, all of you, I suppose? You're the right age for that sort of thing," she added, embracing in a comprehensive glance M. de Châtellerault, his friend and Bloch. "Still, I was asked," she went on, pretending, just for fun, to be flattered by the distinction. "In fact, they came specially to ask me." ('They' being the Princesse de Sagan.)

"I haven't had a card," said Bloch, thinking that Mme. de Villeparisis would at once offer to procure him one, and that Mme. de Sagan would be glad to see at her ball the friend of a woman whom she had called in person to invite.

The Marquise made no reply, and Bloch did not press the point, for he had another, more serious matter to discuss with her, and, with that in view, had already asked her whether he might call again in a couple of days. Having heard the two young men say that they had both just resigned from the Rue Royale Club, which was letting in every Tom, Dick and Harry, he wished to ask Mme. de Villeparisis to arrange for his election there.

"Aren't they rather bad form, rather stuck-up snobs, these Sagans?" he inquired in a tone of sarcasm.

"Not at all, they're the best we can do for you in that line," M. d'Argencourt, who adopted all the catch-words of Parisian society, assured him.

"Then," said Bloch, still half in irony, "I suppose it's one of the solemnities, the great social fixtures of the season."

Mme. de Villeparisis turned merrily to Mme. de Guermantes.

"Tell us, is it a great social solemnity, Mme. de Sagan's ball?"

"It's no good asking me," answered the Duchess, "I have never yet succeeded in finding out what a social solemnity is. Besides, society isn't my strong point."

"Indeed; I thought it was just the other way," said Bloch, who supposed Mme. de Guermantes to be speaking seriously.

He continued, to the desperation of M. de Norpois, to ply him with questions about the Dreyfus case. The Ambassador declared that, looking at it from outside, he got the impression from du Paty de Clam of a somewhat cloudy brain, which had perhaps not been very happily chosen to conduct that delicate operation, which required so much coolness and discernment, a judicial inquiry.

"I know that the Socialist Party are crying aloud for his head on a charger, as well as for the immediate release of the prisoner from the Devil's Isle. But I think that we are not yet reduced to the necessity of passing the Caudine Forks of MM. Gérault-Richard and Company. So far, the whole case has been an utter mystery, I don't say that on one side just as much as on the other there has not been some pretty dirty work to be hushed up. That certain of your client's more or less disinterested protectors may have the best intentions I will not attempt to deny, but you know that heaven is paved with such things," he added, with a look of great subtlety. "It is essential that the Government should give the impression that they are not in the hands of the factions of the Left, and that they are not going to surrender themselves, bound hand and foot, at the demand of some pretorian guard or other, which, believe me, is not the same thing as the Army. It stands to reason that, should any fresh evidence come to light, a new trial would be ordered. And what follows from that? Obviously, that to demand a new trial is to force an open door. When the day comes, the Government will speak with no uncertain voice or will let fall into abeyance what is their essential prerogative. Cock and bull stories will no longer be enough. We must appoint judges to try Dreyfus. And that will be an easy matter because, although we have acquired the habit, in our sweet France, where we love to belittle ourselves, of thinking or letting it be thought that, in order to hear the words Truth and Justice, it is necessary to cross the Channel, which is very often only a roundabout way of reaching the Spree, there are judges to be found outside Berlin. But once the machinery of Government has been set in motion, will you have ears for the voice of authority? When it bids you perform your duty as a citizen will you have ears for its voice, will you take your stand in the ranks of law and order? When its patriotic appeal sounds, will you have the wisdom not to turn a deaf ear but to answer: 'Present!'?"

M. de Norpois put these questions to Bloch with a vehemence which, while it alarmed my friend, flattered him also; for the Ambassador spoke to him with the air of one addressing a whole party, questioned him as though he had been in the confidence of that party and might be held responsible for the decisions which it would adopt. "Should you fail to disarm," M. de Norpois went on, without waiting for Bloch's collective answer, "should you, before even the ink had dried on the decree ordering the fresh trial of the case, obeying it matters not what insidious word of command, fail, I say, to disarm, and band yourselves, rather, in a sterile opposition which seems to some minds the *ultima ratio* of policy, should you retire to your tents and burn your boats, you would be doing so to your own damnation. Are you the prisoners of those who foment disorder? Have you given them pledges?" Bloch was in doubt how to answer. M. de Norpois gave him no time. "If the negative be true, as I should like to think, and if you have a little of what seems to me to be lamentably lacking in certain of your leaders and your friends, namely political sense, then, on the day when the Criminal Court assembles, if you do not allow yourselves to be dragooned by the fishers in troubled waters, you will have won your battle. I do not guarantee that the whole of the General Staff is going to get away unscathed, but it will be so much to the good if some of them at least can save their faces without setting the heather on fire.

"It stands to reason, moreover, that it is with the Government that it rests to pronounce judgment, and to close the list—already too long—of unpunished crimes, not certainly at the bidding of Socialist agitators, nor yet of any obscure military mouthpiece," he added, looking Bloch boldly in the face, perhaps with the instinct that leads all Conservatives to establish support for themselves in the enemy's camp. "Government action is not to be dictated by the highest bidder, from wherever the bid may come. The Government are not, thank heaven, under the orders of Colonel Driant, nor, at the other end of the scale, under M. Clemenceau's. We must curb the professional agitators and prevent them from raising their heads again. France, the vast majority here in France, desires only to be allowed to work in orderly conditions. As to that, there can be no question whatever. But we must not be afraid to enlighten public opinion; and if a few sheep, of the kind our friend Rabelais knew so well, should dash headlong into the water, it would be as well to point out to them that the water in question was troubled, that it had been troubled deliberately by an agency not within our borders, in order to conceal the dangers lurking in its depths. And the Government ought not to give the impression that they are emerging from their passivity in self-defence when they exercise the right which is essentially their own, I mean that of setting the wheels of justice in motion. The Government will accept all your suggestions. If it is proved that there has been a judicial error, they can be sure of an overwhelming majority which would give them room to act with freedom."

"You, sir," said Bloch, turning to M. d'Argencourt, to whom he had been made known, with the rest of the party, on that gentleman's arrival, "you are a Dreyfusard, of course; they all are, abroad."

"It is a question that concerns only the French themselves, don't you think?" replied M. d'Argencourt with that peculiar form of insolence which consists in ascribing to the other person an opinion which one must, obviously, know that he does not hold since he has just expressed one directly its opposite.

Bloch coloured; M. d'Argencourt smiled, looking round the room, and if this smile, so long as it was directed at the rest of the company, was charged with malice at Bloch's expense, it became tempered with cordiality when finally it came to rest on the face of my friend, so as to deprive him of any excuse for annoyance at the words which he had heard uttered, though those words remained just as cruel. Mme. de Guermantes murmured something to M. d'Argencourt which I could not hear, but which must have referred to Bloch's religion, for there flitted at that moment over the face of the Duchess that expression to which one's fear of being noticed by the person of whom one is speaking gives a certain hesitancy and unreality, while there is blended with it the inquisitive, malicious amusement inspired in one by a group of human beings to which one feels oneself to be fundamentally alien. To retrieve himself, Bloch turned to the Duc de Châtellerault. "You, sir, as a Frenchman, you must be aware that people abroad are all Dreyfusards, although everyone pretends that in France we never know what is going on abroad. Anyhow, I know I can talk freely to you; Saint-Loup told me so." But the young Duke, who felt that every one was turning against Bloch, and was a coward as people often are in society, employing a mordant and precious form of wit which he seemed, by a sort of collateral atavism, to have inherited from M. de Charlus, replied: "You must not ask me, sir, to discuss the Dreyfus case with you; it is a subject which, on principle, I never mention except to Japhetics." Everyone smiled, except Bloch, not that he was not himself in the habit of making scathing references to his Jewish origin, to that side of his ancestry which came from somewhere near Sinai. But instead of one of these epigrams (doubtless because he had not one ready) the operation of the internal machine brought to Bloch's lips something quite different. And we caught only: "But how on earth did you know? Who told you?" as though he had been the son of a convict. Whereas, given his name, which had not exactly a Christian sound, and his face, his surprise argued a certain simplicity of mind.

What M. de Norpois had said not having completely satisfied him, he went up to the librarian and asked him whether Mme. de Villeparisis did not sometimes have in her house M. du Paty de Clam or M. Joseph Reinach. The librarian made no reply; he was a Nationalist, and never ceased preaching to the Marquise that the social revolution might break out at any moment, and that she ought to shew more caution in the choice of her friends. He asked himself whether Bloch might not be a secret emissary of the Syndicate, come to collect information, and went off at once to repeat to Mme. de Villeparisis the questions that Bloch had put to him. She decided that, at the best, he was ill-bred and might be in a position to compromise M. de Norpois. Also, she wished to give satisfaction to the librarian, the only person of whom she went in fear, by whom she was being indoctrinated, though without any marked success (every morning he read her M. Judet's article in the *Petit Journal*). She decided, therefore, to make it plain to Bloch that he need not come to the house again, and had no difficulty in finding, among her social repertory, the scene by which a great lady shows anyone her door, a scene which does not in any way involve the raised finger and blazing eyes that people imagine. As Bloch came up to her to say good-bye, buried in her deep armchair, she seemed only half-awakened from a vague somnolence. Her sunken eyes gleamed with only the feeble though charming light of a pair of pearls. Bloch's farewell, barely pencilling on the Marquise's face a languid smile, drew from her not a word, nor did she offer him her hand. This scene left Bloch in utter bewilderment, but as he was surrounded by a circle of spectators he felt that it could not be prolonged without disadvantage to himself, and, to force the Marquise, the hand which she had made no effort to take he himself thrust out at her. Mme. de Villeparisis was startled. But doubtless, while still bent upon giving an immediate satisfaction to the librarian and the anti-Dreyfusard clan, she wished at the same time to provide for the future, and so contented herself with letting her eyelids droop over her closing eyes.

"I believe she's asleep," said Bloch to the librarian who, feeling that he had the support of the Marquise, assumed an indignant air. "Good-bye, madame," shouted Bloch.

The old lady made the slight movement with her lips of a dying woman who wants to open her mouth but whose eye can no longer recognise people. Then she turned, overflowing with a restored vitality, to M. d'Argencourt, while Bloch left the room, convinced that she must be 'soft' in the head. Full of curiosity and anxious to have more light thrown upon so strange an incident, he came to see her again a few days later. She received him in the most friendly fashion, because she was a good-natured woman, because the librarian was not there, because she had in mind the little play which Bloch was going to produce for her, and finally because she had acted once and for all the little scene of the indignant lady that she had wished to act, a scene that had been universally admired and discussed the same evening in various drawing-rooms, but in a version which had already ceased to bear any resemblance to the truth.

"You were speaking just now of the *Seven Princesses,* Duchess; you know (not that it's anything to be proud of) that the author of that—what shall I call it?—that production is a compatriot of mine," said M. d'Argencourt with a fine scorn blended with satisfaction at knowing more than anyone else in the room about the author of a work which had been under discussion. "Yes, he's a Belgian, by nationality," he went on.

"Indeed! No, we don't accuse you of any responsibility for the *Seven Princesses.* Fortunately for yourself and your compatriots you are not like the author of that absurdity. I know several charming Belgians, yourself, your King, who is inclined to be shy, but full of wit, my Ligne cousins, and heaps of others, but you, I am thankful to say, do not speak the same language as the author of the *Seven Princesses.* Besides, if you want to know, it's not worth talking about, because really there is absolutely nothing in it. You know the sort of people who are always trying to seem obscure, and even plan to make themselves ridiculous to conceal the fact that they have not an idea in their heads. If there was anything behind it all, I may tell you that I'm not in the least afraid of a little daring," she added in a serious tone, "provided that there is some idea in it. I don't know if you've seen Borelli's piece. Some people seem to have been shocked by it, but I must say, even if they stone me through the streets for saying it," she went on, without stopping to think that she ran no very great risk of such a punishment, "I found it immensely interesting. But the *Seven Princesses*! It's all very well, one of them having a fondness for my nephew, I cannot carry family feeling quite . . ."

The Duchess broke off abruptly, for a lady came in who was the Comtesse de Marsantes, Robert's mother. Mme. de Marsantes was regarded in the Faubourg Saint-Germain as a superior being, of a goodness, a resignation that were positively angelic. So I had been told, and had had no particular reason to feel surprised, not knowing at the same time that she was the sister of the Duc de Guermantes. Later, I have always been taken aback, whenever I have learned that such women, melancholy, pure, victimised, venerated like the ideal forms of saints in church windows, had flowered from the same genealogical stem as brothers brutal, debauched and vile. Brothers and sisters, when they are closely alike in features as were the Duc de Guermantes and Mme. de Marsantes, ought (I felt) to have a single intellect in common, the same heart, as a person would have who might vary between good and evil moods but in whom one could not, for all that, expect to find a vast breadth of outlook if he had a narrow mind, or a sublime abnegation if his heart was hard.

Mme. de Marsantes attended Brunetière's lectures. She fascinated the Faubourg Saint-Germain and, by her saintly life, edified it as well. But the morphological link of handsome nose and piercing gaze led one, nevertheless, to classify Mme. de Marsantes in the same intellectual and moral family as her brother the Duke. I could not believe that the mere fact of her being a woman, and perhaps those of her having had an unhappy life and won everyone's sympathy, could make a person be so different from the rest of her family, as in the old romances, where all the virtues and graces are combined in the sister of wild and lawless brothers. It seemed to me that nature, less unconventional than the old poets, must make use almost exclusively of the elements common to the family, and I was unable to credit her with enough power of invention to construct, out of materials analogous to those that composed a fool and clod, a lofty mind without the least strain of clownishness, a saint unsoiled by any brutality. Mme. de Marsantes was wearing a gown of white surah embroidered with large palms, on which stood out flowers of a different material, these being black. This was because, three weeks earlier, she had lost her cousin, M. de Montmorency, a bereavement which did not prevent her from paying calls or even from going to small dinners, but always in mourning. She was a great lady. Atavism had filled her with the frivolity of generations of life at court, with all the superficial, rigorous duties that that implies. Mme. de Marsantes had not had the strength of character to regret for any length of time the death of her father and mother, but she would not for anything in the world have appeared in colours in the month following that of a cousin. She was more than pleasant to me, both because I was Robert's friend and because I did not move in the same world as he. This pleasantness was accompanied by a pretence of shyness, by that sort of intermittent withdrawal of the voice, the eyes, the mind which a woman draws back to her like a skirt that has indiscreetly spread, so as not to take up too much room, to remain stiff and erect even in her suppleness, as a good upbringing teaches. A good upbringing which must not, however, be taken too literally, many of these ladies passing very swiftly into a complete dissolution of morals without ever losing the almost childlike correctness of their manners. Mme. de Marsantes was a trifle irritating in conversation since, whenever she had occasion to speak of a plebeian, as for instance Bergotte or Elstir, she would say, isolating the word, giving it its full value, intoning it on two different notes with a modulation peculiar to the Guermantes: "I have had the *honour,* the great *hon*-our of meeting Monsieur Bergotte," or "of making the acquaintance of Monsieur Elstir," whether that her hearers might marvel at her humility or from the same tendency that Mme. de Guermantes shewed to revert to the use of obsolete forms, as a protest against the slovenly usages of the present day, in which people never professed themselves sufficiently 'honoured.' Whichever of these was the true reason, one felt that when Mme. de Marsantes said: "I have had the *honour,* the great *hon*-our," she felt she was playing an important part and shewing that she could take in the names of distinguished men as she would have welcomed the men themselves at her home in the country, had they happened to be in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, as her family connexion was numerous, as she was devoted to all her relatives, as, slow in speech and fond of explaining things at length, she was always trying to make clear the exact degree of kinship, she found herself (without any desire to create an effect and without really caring to talk about anyone except touching peasants and sublime gamekeepers) referring incessantly to all the mediatised houses in Europe, a failing which people less brilliantly connected than herself could not forgive, and, if they were at all intellectual, derided as a sign of stupidity.

In the country, Mme. de Marsantes was adored for the good that she did, but principally because the purity of a strain of blood into which for many generations there had flowed only what was greatest in the history of France had taken from her manner everything that the lower orders call 'manners,' and had given her a perfect simplicity. She never shrank from kissing a poor woman who was in trouble, and would tell her to come up to the castle for a cartload of wood. She was, people said, the perfect Christian. She was determined to find an immensely rich wife for Robert. Being a great lady means playing the great lady, that is to say, to a certain extent, playing at simplicity. It is a pastime which costs an extremely high price, all the more because simplicity charms people only on condition that they know that you are not bound to live simply, that is to say that you are very rich. Some one said to me afterwards, when I had told him of my meeting her: "You saw of course that she must have been lovely as a young woman." But true beauty is so individual, so novel always, that one does not recognise it as beauty. I said to myself this afternoon only that she had a tiny nose, very blue eyes, a long neck and a sad expression.

"Listen," said Mme. de Villeparisis to the Duchesse de Guermantes, "I'm expecting a woman at any moment whom you don't wish to know. I thought I'd better warn you, to avoid any unpleasantness. But you needn't be afraid, I shall never have her here again, only I was obliged to let her come to-day. It's Swann's wife."

Mme. Swann, seeing the dimensions that the Dreyfus case had begun to assume, and fearing that her husband's racial origin might be used against herself, had besought him never again to allude to the prisoner's innocence. When he was not present she went farther and used to profess the most ardent Nationalism; in doing which she was only following the example of Mme. Verdurin, in whom a middle-class anti-semitism, latent hitherto, had awakened and grown to a positive fury. Mme. Swann had won by this attitude the privilege of membership in several of the women's leagues that were beginning to be formed in anti-semitic society, and had succeeded in making friends with various members of the aristocracy. It may seem strange that, so far from following their example, the Duchesse de Guermantes, so close a friend of Swann, had on the contrary always resisted his desire, which he had not concealed from her, to introduce to her his wife. But we shall see in due course that this arose from the peculiar nature of the Duchess, who held that she was not 'bound to' do things, and laid down with despotic force what had been decided by her social 'free will,' which was extremely arbitrary.

"Thank you for telling me," said the Duchess. "It would indeed be most unpleasant. But as I know her by sight I shall be able to get away in time."

"I assure you, Oriane, she is really quite nice; an excellent woman," said Mme. de Marsantes.

"I have no doubt she is, but I feel no need to assure myself of it."

"Have you been invited to Lady Israels's?" Mme. de Villeparisis asked the Duchess, to change the conversation.

"Why, thank heaven, I don't know the woman," replied Mme. de Guermantes. "You must ask Marie-Aynard. She knows her. I never could make out why."

"I did indeed know her at one time," said Mme. de Marsantes. "I confess my faults. But I have decided not to know her any more. It seems she's one of the very worst of them, and makes no attempt to conceal it. Besides, we have all been too trusting, too hospitable. I shall never go near anyone of that race again. While we had old friends, country cousins, people of our own flesh and blood on whom we shut our doors, we threw them open to Jews. And now we see what thanks we get from them. But I've no right to speak; I have an adorable son, and, like a young fool, he says and does all the maddest things you can imagine," she went on, having caught some allusion by M. d'Argencourt to Robert. "But, talking of Robert, haven't you seen him?" she asked Mme. de Villeparisis; "being Saturday, I thought he'd be coming to Paris on leave, and in that case he would be sure to pay you a visit."

As a matter of fact Mme. de Marsantes thought that her son would not obtain leave that week; but knowing that, even if he did, he would never dream of coming to see Mme. de Villeparisis, she hoped, by making herself appear to have expected to find him in the room, to procure his forgiveness from her susceptible aunt for all the visits that he had failed to pay her.

"Robert here! But I have never had a single word from him; I don't think I've seen him since Balbec."

"He is so busy; he has so much to do," pleaded Mme. de Marsantes.

A faint smile made Mme. de Guermantes's eyelashes quiver as she studied the circle which, with the point of her sunshade, she was tracing on the carpet. Whenever the Duke had been too openly unfaithful to his wife, Mme. de Marsantes had always taken up the cudgels against her own brother on her sister-in-law's behalf. The latter had a grateful and bitter memory of this protection, and was not herself seriously shocked by Robert's pranks. At this point the door opened again and Robert himself entered the room.

"Well, talk of the Saint!" said Mme. de Guermantes.

Mme. de Marsantes, who had her back to the door, had not seen her son come in. When she did catch sight of him, her motherly bosom was convulsed with joy, as by the beating of a wing, her body half rose from her seat, her face quivered and she fastened on Robert eyes big with astonishment.

"What! You've come! How delightful! What a surprise!"

"Ah! *Talk of the Saint!*—I see," cried the Belgian diplomat, with a shout of laughter.

"Delicious, ain't it?" came tartly from the Duchess, who hated puns, and had ventured on this one only with a pretence of making fun of herself.

"Good afternoon, Robert," she said, "I believe he's forgotten his aunt."

They talked for a moment, probably about myself, for as Saint-Loup was leaving her to join his mother Mme. de Guermantes turned to me:

"Good afternoon; how are you?" was her greeting.

She allowed to rain on me the light of her azure gaze, hesitated for a moment, unfolded and stretched towards me the stem of her arm, leaned forward her body which sprang rapidly backwards like a bush that has been pulled down to the ground and, on being released, returns to its natural position. Thus she acted under the fire of Saint-Loup's eyes, which kept her under observation and were making frantic efforts to obtain some further concession still from his aunt. Fearing that our conversation might fail altogether, he joined in, to stimulate it, and answered for me:

"He's not very well just now, he gets rather tired; I think he would be a great deal better, by the way, if he saw you more often, for I can't help telling you that he admires you immensely."

"Oh, but that's very nice of him," said Mme. de Guermantes in a deliberately casual tone, as if I had brought her her cloak. "I am most flattered."

"Look, I must go and talk to my mother for a minute; take my chair," said Saint-Loup, thus forcing me to sit down next to his aunt.

We were both silent.

"I see you sometimes in the morning," she said, as though she were telling me something that I did not know, and I for my part had never seen her. "It's so good for one, a walk."

"Oriane," began Mme. de Marsantes in a low tone, "you said you were going on to Mme. de Saint-Ferréol's; would you be so very kind as to tell her not to expect me to dinner, I shall stay at home now that I've got Robert. And one other thing, but I hardly like to ask you, if you would leave word as you pass to tell them to send out at once for a box of the cigars Robert likes. 'Corona,' they're called. I've none in the house."

Robert came up to us; he had caught only the name of Mme. de Saint-Ferréol.

"Who in the world is Mme. de Saint-Ferréol?" he inquired, in a surprised but decisive tone, for he affected a studied ignorance of everything to do with society.

"But, my dear boy, you know quite well," said his mother. "She's Vermandois's sister. It was she gave you that nice billiard table you liked so much."

"What, she's Vermandois's sister, I had no idea of that. Really, my family are amazing," he went on, turning so as to include me in the conversation and adopting unconsciously Bloch's intonation just as he borrowed his ideas, "they know the most unheard-of people, people called Saint-Ferréol" (emphasising the final consonant of each word) "and names like that; they go to balls, they drive in victorias, they lead a fabulous existence. It's prodigious."

Mme. de Guermantes made in her throat a slight, short, sharp sound, as of an involuntary laugh which one chokes back, meaning thereby to shew that she paid just as much tribute as the laws of kinship imposed on her to her nephew's wit. A servant came in to say that the Prince von Faffenheim-Munsterburg-Weinigen had sent word to M. de Norpois that he was waiting.

"Bring him in, sir," said Mme. de Villeparisis to the old Ambassador, who started in quest of the German Minister.

"Stop, sir; do you think I ought to shew him the miniature of the Empress Charlotte?"

"Why, I'm sure he'll be delighted," said the Ambassador in a tone of conviction, and as though he were envying the fortunate Minister the favour that was in store for him.

"Oh, I know he's very *sound*," said Mme. de Marsantes, "and that is so rare among foreigners. But I've found out all about him. He is anti-semitism personified."

The Prince's name preserved in the boldness with which its opening syllables were—to borrow an expression from music—attacked, and in the stammering repetition that scanned them, the impulse, the mannered simplicity, the heavy delicacies of the Teutonic race, projected like green boughs over the 'heim' of dark blue enamel which glowed with the mystic light of a Rhenish window behind the pale and finely wrought gildings of the German eighteenth century. This name included, among the several names of which it was composed, that of a little German watering-place to which as a child I had gone with my grandmother, at the foot of a mountain honoured by the feet of Goethe, from the vineyards of which we used to drink, at the Kurhof, their illustrious vintages with elaborate and sonorous names, like the epithets which Homer applies to his heroes. And so, scarcely had I heard the Prince's name spoken than, before I had recalled the watering-place, the name itself seemed to shrink, to grow rich with humanity, to find large enough a little place in my memory to which it clung, familiar, earth to earth, picturesque, savoury, light, with something about it, too, that was authorised, prescribed. And then, M. de Guermantes, in explaining who the Prince was, quoted a number of his titles, and I recognised the name of a village threaded by the river on which, every evening, my cure finished for the day, I used to go in a boat amid the mosquitoes, and that of a forest so far away that the doctor would not allow me to make the excursion to it. And indeed it was comprehensible that the suzerainty of the lord extended to the surrounding places and associated afresh in the enumeration of his titles the names which one could read, close together, upon a map. Thus beneath the visor of the Prince of the Holy Roman Empire and Knight of Franconia it was the face of a dear and smiling land, on which had often lingered for me the light of the six-o'clock sun, that I saw, at any rate before the Prince, Rheingraf and Elector Palatine had entered the room. For I speedily learned that the revenues which he drew from the forest and river, peopled with gnomes and undines, and from the enchanted mountain on which rose the ancient Burg that cherished memories of Luther and Lewis the Germanic, he employed in keeping five Charron motor-cars, a house in Paris and one in London, a box on Mondays at the Opera and another for the 'Tuesdays' at the 'Francais.' He did not seem to me, nor did he seem to regard himself as different from other men of similar fortune and age who had a less poetic origin. He had their culture, their ideals, he was proud of his rank, but purely on account of the advantages it conferred on him, and had now only one ambition in life, to be elected a Corresponding Member of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, which was the reason of his coming to see Mme. de Villeparisis. If he, whose wife was a leader of the most exclusive set in Berlin, had begged to be introduced to the Marquise, it was not the result of any desire on his part for her acquaintance. Devoured for years past by this ambition to be elected to the Institute, he had unfortunately never been in a position to reckon above five the number of Academicians who seemed prepared to vote for him. He knew that M. de Norpois could by himself dispose of at least ten others, a number which he was capable, by skilful negotiations, of increasing still further. And so the Prince, who had known him in Russia when they were both there as Ambassadors, had gone to see him and had done everything in his power to win him over. But in vain might he multiply his friendly overtures, procure for the Marquis Russian decorations, quote him in articles on foreign politics; he had had before him an ingrate, a man in whose eyes all these attentions appeared to count as nothing, who had not advanced the prospects of his candidature one inch, had not even promised him his own vote. No doubt M. de Norpois received him with extreme politeness, indeed begged that he would not put himself out and "take the trouble to come so far out of his way," went himself to the Prince's residence, and when the Teutonic Knight had launched his: "I should like immensely to be your colleague," replied in a tone of deep emotion: "Ah! I should be most happy!" And no doubt a simpleton, a Dr. Cottard would have said to himself: "Well, here he is in my house; it was he who insisted on coming, because he regards me as a more important person than himself; he tells me that he would be happy to see me in the Academy; words do have some meaning after all, damn it, probably if he doesn't offer to vote for me it is because it hasn't occurred to him. He lays so much stress on my great influence; presumably he imagines that larks drop into my mouth ready roasted, that I have all the support I want, and that is why he doesn't offer me his; but I have only got to get him with his back to the wall, and just say to him quietly: 'Very well, vote for me, will you?' and he will be obliged to do it."

But Prince von Faffenheim was no simpleton. He was what Dr. Cottard would have called 'a fine diplomat' and he knew that M. de Norpois was no less fine a one than himself, nor a man who would have failed to realise without needing to be told that he could confer a favour on a candidate by voting for him. The Prince, in his Embassies and as Foreign Minister, had conducted, on his country's behalf instead of, as in the present instance, his own, many of those conversations in which one knows beforehand just how far one is prepared to go and at what point one will decline to commit oneself. He was not unaware that, in this diplomatic language, to talk meant to offer. And it was for this reason that he had arranged for M. de Norpois to receive the Cordon of Saint Andrew. But if he had had to report to his Government the conversation which he had subsequently had with M. de Norpois, he would have stated in his dispatch: "I realised that I had gone the wrong way to work." For as soon as he had returned to the subject of the Institute, M. de Norpois had repeated:

"I should like nothing better; nothing could be better, for my colleagues. They ought, I consider, to feel genuinely honoured that you should have thought of them. It is a really interesting candidature, a little outside our ordinary course. As you know, the Academy is very conventional, it takes fright at everything which has at all a novel sound. Personally, I deplore this. How often have I had occasion to say as much to my colleagues! I cannot be sure, God forgive me, that I did not even once let the word 'hidebound' escape me," he added, in an undertone, with a scandalised smile, almost aside, as in a scene on the stage, casting at the Prince a rapid, sidelong glance from his blue eyes, like a veteran actor studying the effect on his audience. "You understand, Prince, that I should not care to allow a personality so eminent as yourself to embark on a venture which was hopeless from the start. So long as my colleagues' ideas linger so far behind the times, I consider that the wiser course will be to abstain. But you may rest assured that if I were ever to discern a mind that was a little more modern, a little more alive, shewing itself in that college, which is tending to become a mausoleum, if I could reckon upon any possible chance of your success, I should be the first to inform you of it."

"The Cordon was a mistake," thought the Prince; "the negotiations have not advanced in the least; that is not what he wanted. I have not yet laid my hand on the right key."

This was a kind of reasoning of which M. de Norpois, formed in the same school as the Prince, would also have been capable. One may mock at the pedantic silliness with which diplomats of the Norpois type go into ecstasies over some piece of official wording which is, for all practical purposes, meaningless. But their childishness has this compensation; diplomats know that, in the loaded scales which assure that European or other equilibrium which we call peace, good feeling, sounding speeches, earnest entreaties weigh very little; and that the heavy weight, the true determinant consists in something else, in the possibility which the adversary does (if he is strong enough) or does not enjoy of satisfying, in exchange for what one oneself wants, a desire. With this order of truths, which an entirely disinterested person, such as my grandmother for instance, would not have understood, M. de Norpois and Prince von Faffenheim had frequently had to deal. Chargé d'Affaires in countries with which we had been within an ace of going to war, M. de Norpois, in his anxiety as to the turn which events were about to take, knew very well that it was not by the word 'Peace,' nor by the word 'War' that it would be revealed to him, but by some other, apparently commonplace word, a word of terror or blessing, which the diplomat, by the aid of his cipher, would immediately read and to which, to safeguard the honour of France, he would respond in another word, quite as commonplace, but one beneath which the Minister of the enemy nation would at once see written: 'War.' Moreover, in accordance with a time-honoured custom, analogous to that which gave to the first meeting between two young people promised to one another in marriage the form of a chance encounter at a performance in the Théâtre du Gymnase, the dialogue in the course of which destiny was to dictate the word 'War' or the word 'Peace' was held, as a rule, not in the ministerial sanctum but on a bench in a Kurgarten where the Minister and M. de Norpois went independently to a thermal spring to drink at its source their little tumblers of some curative water. By a sort of tacit convention they met at the hour appointed for their cure, began by taking together a short stroll which, beneath its innocent appearance, each of the speakers knew to be as tragic as an order for mobilisation. And so, in a private matter like this nomination for election to the Institute, the Prince had employed the same system of induction which had served him in his public career, the same method of reading beneath superimposed symbols.

And certainly it would be wrong to pretend that my grandmother and the few who resembled her would have been alone in their failure to understand this kind of calculation. For one thing, the average human being, practising a profession the lines of which have been laid down for him from the start, comes near, by his want of intuition, to the ignorance which my grandmother owed to her lofty disinterestedness. Often one has to come down to 'kept' persons, male or female, before one finds the hidden spring of actions or words apparently of the most innocent nature in self-interest, in the bare necessity to keep alive. What man does not know that when a woman whom he is going to pay says to him: "Don't let's talk about money," the speech must be regarded as what is called in music 'a silent beat' and that if, later on, she declares: "You are far too much trouble; you are always keeping things from me; I've done with you," he must interpret this as: "Some one else has been offering me more." And yet this is only the language of a lady of easy virtue, not so far removed from the ladies in society. The *apache* furnishes more striking examples. But M. de Norpois and the German Prince, if *apaches* and their ways were unknown to them, had been accustomed to living on the same plane as nations, which are also, despite their greatness, creatures of selfishness and cunning, kept in order only by force, by consideration of their material interests which may drive them to murder, a murder that is often symbolic also, since its mere hesitation or refusal to fight may spell for a nation the word 'Perish.'

But inasmuch as all this is not set forth in Yellow and otherwise coloured Books, the people as a whole are naturally pacific; should they be warlike, it is instinctively, from hatred, from a sense of injury, not for the reasons which have made up the mind of their ruler, on the advice of his Norpois.

The following winter the Prince was seriously ill; he recovered, but his heart was permanently affected.

"The devil!" he said to himself, "I can't afford to lose any time over the Institute. If I wait too long, I may be dead before they elect me. That really would be unpleasant."

He composed, on the foreign politics of the last twenty years, an essay for the *Revue des Deux Mondes,* in which he referred more than once, and in the most flattering terms, to M. de Norpois. The French diplomat called upon him to thank him. He added that he did not know how to express his gratitude. The Prince said to himself, like a man who has been trying to fit various keys into a stubborn lock: "Still not the right one!" and, feeling somewhat out of breath as he shewed M. de Norpois to the door, thought: "Damn it, these fellows will see me in my grave before letting me in. We must hurry up."

That evening, he met M. de Norpois again at the Opera.

"My dear Ambassador," he began to him, "you told me to-day that you did not know what you could do to prove your gratitude; it was a great exaggeration, for you owe me none, but I am going to be so indelicate as to take you at your word."

M. de Norpois had no less high an esteem for the Prince's tact than the Prince had for his. He understood at once that it was not a request that Prince von Faffenheim was about to present to him, but an offer, and with a radiant affability made ready to hear it.

"Well now, you will think me highly indiscreet. There are two people to whom I am greatly attached—in quite different ways, as you will understand in a moment—two people both of whom have recently settled in Paris, where they intend to remain for the future: my wife, and the Grand Duchess John. They are thinking of giving a few dinners, chiefly in honour of the King and Queen of England, and what they would have liked more than anything in the world would have been to be able to offer their guests the company of a person for whom, without knowing her, they both of them feel a great admiration. I confess that I did not know how I was going to gratify their wish when I learned just now, by the most extraordinary accident, that you were a friend of this person. I know that she lives a most retired life, and sees only a very few people—'happy few,' as Stendhal would say—but if you were to give me your backing, with the generosity that you have always shewn me, I am sure that she would allow you to present me to her and to convey to her the wishes of both the Grand Duchess and the Princess. Perhaps she would consent to dine with us, when the Queen of England comes, and then (one never knows) if we don't bore her too much, to spend the Easter holidays with us at Beaulieu, at the Grand Duchess John's. The person I allude to is called the Marquise de Villeparisis. I confess that the hope of becoming one of the frequenters of such a school of wit would console me, would make me contemplate without regret the abandoning of my attempt at the Institute. For in her house, too, I understand, there is a regular flow of intellect and brilliant talk."

With an inexpressible sense of pleasure the Prince felt that the lock no longer resisted, and that at last the key was turning.

"Such an alternative is wholly unnecessary, my dear Prince," replied M. de Norpois; "nothing is more in harmony with the Institute than the house you speak of, which is a regular hotbed of Academicians. I shall convey your request to Mme. la Marquise de Villeparisis: she will undoubtedly be flattered. As for her dining with you, she goes out very little, and that will perhaps be more difficult to arrange. But I shall present you to her and you can plead your cause in person. You must on no account give up the Academy; to-morrow fortnight, as it happens, I shall be having luncheon, before going on with him to an important meeting, at Leroy-Beaulieu's, without whom nobody can be elected; I had already allowed myself in conversation with him to let fall your name, with which, naturally, he was perfectly familiar. He raised certain objections. But it so happens that he requires the support of my group at the next election, and I fully intend to return to the charge; I shall tell him quite openly of the wholly cordial ties that unite us, I shall not conceal from him that, if you were to stand, I should ask all my friends to vote for you," (here the Prince breathed a deep sigh of relief) "and he knows that I have friends. I consider that if I were to succeed in obtaining his assistance your chances would become very strong. Come that evening, at six, to Mme. de Villeparisis's; I will introduce you to her and I can give you an account then of my conversation with him."

Thus it was that Prince von Faffenheim had been led to call upon Mme. de Villeparisis. My profound disillusionment occurred when he spoke. It had never struck me that, if an epoch in history has features both particular and general which are stronger than those of a nationality, so that in a biographical dictionary with illustrations, which go so far as to include an authentic portrait of Minerva, Leibniz with his wig and ruff differs little from Marivaux or Samuel Bernard, a nationality has particular features stronger than those of a caste. In the present instance these were rendered before me not by a discourse in which I had expected, before I saw him, to hear the rustling of the elves and the dance of the kobolds, but by a transposition which certified no less plainly that poetic origin: the fact that, as he bowed, short, red, corpulent, over the hand of Mme. de Villeparisis, the Rheingraf said to her: "Aow to you too, Matame la Marquise," in the accent of an Alsatian porter.

"Won't you let me give you a cup of tea or a little of this cake; it is so good?" Mme. de Guermantes asked me, anxious to have shewn herself as friendly as possible. "I do the honours in this house just as if it was mine," she explained in an ironical tone which gave a slightly guttural sound to her voice, as though she were trying to stifle a hoarse laugh.

"Sir," said Mme. de Villeparisis to M. de Norpois, "you won't forget that you have something to say to the Prince about the Academy?"

Mme. de Guermantes lowered her eyes and gave a semicircular turn to her wrist to look at the time.

"Gracious! I must fly at once if I'm to get to Mme. de Saint-Ferréol's, and I'm dining with Mme. Leroi."

And she rose without bidding me good-bye. She had just caught sight of Mme. Swann, who appeared considerably embarrassed at finding me in the room. She remembered, doubtless, that she had been the first to assure me that she was convinced of Dreyfus's innocence.

"I don't want my mother to introduce me to Mme. Swann," Saint-Loup said to me. "She's an ex-whore. Her husband's a Jew, and she comes here to pose as a Nationalist. Hallo, here's Uncle Palamède."

The arrival of Mme. Swann had a special interest for me, due to an incident which had occurred a few days earlier and which I am obliged to record on account of the consequences which it was to have at a much later date, as the reader will learn in due course. Well, a few days before this visit to Mme. de Villeparisis, I had myself received a visitor whom I little expected, namely Charles Morel, the son (though I had never heard of his existence) of my great-uncle's old servant. This great-uncle (he in whose house I had met the lady in pink) had died the year before. His servant had more than once expressed his intention of coming to see me; I had no idea of the object of his visit, but should have been glad to see him for I had learned from Françoise that he had a genuine veneration for my uncle's memory and made a pilgrimage regularly to the cemetery in which he was buried. But, being obliged, for reasons of health, to retire to his home in the country, where he expected to remain for some time, he delegated the duty to his son. I was surprised to see come into my room a handsome young fellow of eighteen, dressed with expensive rather than good taste, but looking, all the same, like anything in the world except the son of a gentleman's servant. He made a point, moreover, at the start of our conversation, of severing all connexion with the domestic class from which he sprang, by informing me, with a smile of satisfaction, that he had won the first prize at the Conservatoire. The object of his visit to me was as follows: his father, when going through the effects of my uncle Adolphe, had set aside some which, he felt, could not very well be sent to my parents but were at the same time of a nature likely to interest a young man of my age. These were the photographs of the famous actresses, the notorious courtesans whom my uncle had known, the last fading pictures of that gay life of a man about town which he divided by a watertight compartment from his family life. While young Morel was shewing them to me, I noticed that he addressed me as though he were speaking to an equal. He derived from saying 'you' to me as often, and 'sir' as seldom, as possible the pleasure natural in one whose father had never ventured, when addressing my parents, upon anything but the third person. Almost all these photographs bore an inscription such as: "To my best friend." One actress, less grateful and more circumspect than the rest, had written: "To the best of friends," which enabled her (so I was assured) to say afterwards that my uncle was in no sense and had never been her best friend but was merely the friend who had done the most little services for her, the friend she made use of, a good, kind man, in other words an old fool. In vain might young Morel seek to divest himself of his lowly origin, one felt that the shade of my uncle Adolphe, venerable and gigantic in the eyes of the old servant, had never ceased to hover, almost a holy vision, over the childhood and boyhood of the son. While I was turning over the photographs Charles Morel examined my room. And as I was looking for some place in which I might keep them, "How is it," he asked me (in a tone in which the reproach had no need to find expression, so implicit was it in the words themselves), "that I don't see a single photograph of your uncle in your room?" I felt the blood rise to my cheeks and stammered: "Why, I don't believe I have such a thing." "What, you haven't one photograph of your uncle Adolphe, who was so devoted to you! I will send you one of my governor's—he has quantities of them—and I hope you will set it up in the place of honour above that chest of drawers, which came to you from your uncle." It is true that, as I had not even a photograph of my father or mother in my room, there was nothing so very shocking in there not being one of my uncle Adolphe. But it was easy enough to see that for old Morel, who had trained his son in the same way of thinking, my uncle was the important person in the family, my parents only reflecting a diminished light from his. I was in higher favour, because my uncle used constantly to say that I was going to turn out a sort of Racine, or Vaulabelle, and Morel regarded me almost as an adopted son, as a child by election of my uncle. I soon discovered that this young man was extremely 'pushing.' Thus at this first meeting he asked me, being something of a composer as well and capable of setting short poems to music, whether I knew any poet who had a good position in society. I mentioned one. He did not know the work of this poet and had never heard his name, of which he made a note. Well, I found out that shortly afterwards he wrote to the poet telling him that, a fanatical admirer of his work, he, Morel, had composed a musical setting for one of his sonnets and would be grateful if the author would arrange for its performance at the Comtesse So-and-So's. This was going a little too fast, and exposing his hand. The poet, taking offence, made no reply.

For the rest, Charles Morel seemed to have, besides his ambition, a strong leaning towards more concrete realities. He had noticed, as he came through the courtyard, Jupien's niece at work upon a waistcoat, and although he explained to me only that he happened to want a fancy waistcoat at that very moment, I felt that the girl had made a vivid impression on him. He had no hesitation about asking me to come downstairs and introduce him to her, "but not as a connexion of your family, you follow me, I rely on your discretion not to drag in my father, say just a distinguished artist of your acquaintance, you know how important it is to make a good impression on tradespeople." Albeit he had suggested to me that, not knowing him well enough to call him, he quite realised, 'dear friend,' I might address him, before the girl, in some such terms as "not dear master, of course, . . . although . . . well, if you like, dear distinguished artist," once in the shop, I avoided 'qualifying' him, as Saint-Simon would have expressed it, and contented myself with reiterating his 'you.' He picked out from several patterns of velvet one of the brightest red imaginable and so loud that, for all his bad taste, he was never able to wear the waistcoat when it was made. The girl settled down to work again with her two 'apprentices,' but it struck me that the impression had been mutual, and that Charles Morel, whom she regarded as of her own 'station' (only smarter and richer), had proved singularly attractive to her. As I had been greatly surprised to find among the photographs which his father had sent me one of the portrait of Miss Sacripant (otherwise Odette) by Elstir, I said to Charles Morel as I went with him to the outer gate: "I don't suppose you can tell me, but did my uncle know this lady well? I don't see at what stage in his life I can fit her in exactly; and it interests me, because of M. Swann . . ." "Why, if I wasn't forgetting to tell you that my father asked me specially to draw your attention to that lady's picture. As a matter of fact, she was 'lunching' with your uncle the last time you ever saw him. My father was in two minds whether to let you in. It seems you made a great impression on the wench, and she hoped to see more of you. But just at that time there was some trouble in the family, by what my father tells me, and you never set eyes on your uncle again." He broke off with a smile of farewell, across the courtyard, at Jupien's niece. She was watching him and admiring, no doubt, his thin face and regular features, his fair hair and sparkling eyes. I, as I gave him my hand, was thinking of Mme. Swann and saying to myself with amazement, so far apart, so different were they in my memory, that I should have henceforth to identify her with the 'Lady in pink.'

M. de Charlus was not long in taking his place by the side of Mme. Swann. At every social gathering at which he appeared and, contemptuous towards the men, courted by the women, promptly attached himself to the smartest of the latter, whose garments he seemed almost to put on as an ornament to his own, the Baron's frock coat or swallowtails made one think of a portrait by some great painter of a man dressed in black but having by his side, thrown over a chair, the brilliantly coloured cloak which he is about to wear at some costume ball. This partnership, generally with some royal lady, secured for M. de Charlus various privileges which he liked to enjoy. For instance, one result of it was that his hostesses, at theatricals or concerts, allowed the Baron alone to have a front seat, in a row of ladies, while the rest of the men were crowded together at the back of the room. And then besides, completely absorbed, it seemed, in repeating, at the top of his voice, amusing stories to the enraptured lady, M. de Charlus was dispensed from the necessity of going to shake hands with any of the others, was set free, in other words, from all social duties. Behind the scented barrier in which the beauty of his choice enclosed him, he was isolated amid a crowded drawing-room, as, in a crowded theatre or concert-hall, behind the rampart of a box; and when anyone came up to greet him, through, so to speak, the beauty of his companion, it was permissible for him to reply quite curtly and without interrupting his business of conversation with a lady. Certainly Mme. Swann was scarcely of the rank of the people with whom he liked thus to flaunt himself. But he professed admiration for her, friendship for Swann, he knew that she would be flattered by his attentions and was himself flattered at being compromised by the prettiest woman in the room.

Mme. de Villeparisis meanwhile was not too well pleased to receive a visit from M. de Charlus. He, while admitting serious defects in his aunt's character, was genuinely fond of her. But every now and then, carried away by anger, by an imaginary grievance, he would sit down and write to her, without making any attempt to resist his impulse, letters full of the most violent abuse, in which he made the most of trifling incidents which until then he seemed never even to have noticed. Among other examples I may instance the following, which my stay at Balbec brought to my knowledge: Mme. de Villeparisis, fearing that she had not brought enough money with her to Balbec to enable her to prolong her holiday there, and not caring, since she was of a thrifty disposition and shrank from unnecessary expenditure, to have money sent to her from Paris, had borrowed three thousand francs from M. de Charlus. A month later, annoyed, for some trivial reason, with his aunt, he asked her to repay him this sum by telegraph. He received two thousand nine hundred and ninety-odd francs. Meeting his aunt a few days later in Paris, in the course of a friendly conversation, he drew her attention, with the utmost politeness, to the mistake that her banker had made when sending the money. "But there was no mistake," replied Mme. de Villeparisis, "the money order cost six francs seventy-five." "Oh, of course, if it was intentional, it is all right," said M. de Charlus, "I mentioned it only in case you didn't know, because in that case, if the bank had done the same thing with anyone who didn't know you as well as I do, it might have led to unpleasantness." "No, no, there was no mistake." "After all, you were quite right," M. de Charlus concluded easily, stooping to kiss his aunt's hand. And in fact he bore no resentment and was only amused at this little instance of her thrift. But some time afterwards, imagining that, in a family matter, his aunt had been trying to get the better of him and had 'worked up a regular conspiracy' against him, as she took shelter, foolishly enough, behind the lawyers with whom he suspected her of having plotted to undo him, he had written her a letter boiling over with insolence and rage. "I shall not be satisfied with having my revenge," he added as a postscript; "I shall take care to make you a laughing-stock. Tomorrow I shall tell everyone the story of the money order and the six francs seventy-five you kept back from me out of the three thousand I lent you; I shall disgrace you publicly." Instead of so doing, he had gone to his aunt the next day to beg her pardon, having already regretted a letter in which he had used some really terrible language. But apart from this, to whom could he have told the story of the money order? Seeking no longer vengeance but a sincere reconciliation, now was the time for him to keep silence. But already he had repeated the story everywhere, while still on the best of terms with his aunt; he had told it without any malice, as a joke, and because he was the soul of indiscretion. He had repeated the story, but without Mme. de Villeparisis's knowledge. With the result that, having learned from his letter that he intended to disgrace her by making public a transaction in which he had told her with his own lips that she had acted rightly, she concluded that he had been deceiving her from the first, and had lied when he pretended to be fond of her. This storm had now died down, but neither of them knew what opinion exactly the other had of her or him. This sort of intermittent quarrel is of course somewhat exceptional. Of a different order were the quarrels of Bloch and his friends. Of a different order again were those of M. de Charlus, as we shall presently see, with people wholly unlike Mme. de Villeparisis. In spite of which we must bear in mind that the opinions which we hold of one another, our relations with friends and kinsfolk, are in no sense permanent, save in appearance, but are as eternally fluid as the sea itself. Whence all the rumours of divorce between couples who have always seemed so perfectly united and will soon afterwards speak of one another with affection, hence all the terrible things said by one friend of another from whom we supposed him to be inseparable and with whom we shall find him once more reconciled before we have had time to recover from our surprise; all the ruptures of alliances, after so short a time, between nations.

"I say, my uncle and Mme. Swann are getting warm over there!" remarked Saint-Loup. "And look at Mamma in the innocence of her heart going across to disturb them. To the pure all things are pure, I suppose!"

I studied M. de Charlus. The tuft of his grey hair, his eye, the brow of which was raised by his monocle to emit a smile, the red flowers in his buttonhole formed, so to speak, the three mobile apices of a convulsive and striking triangle. I had not ventured to bow to him, for he had given me no sign of recognition. And yet, albeit he had not turned his head in my direction, I was convinced that he had seen me; while he repeated some story to Mme. Swann, whose sumptuous, pansy-coloured cloak floated actually over the Baron's knee, his roving eye, like that of a street hawker who is watching all the time for the 'tecs' to appear, had certainly explored every corner of the room and taken note of all the people who were in it. M. de Châtellerault came up to bid him good day without any indication on M. de Charlus's face that he had seen the young Duke until he was actually standing in front of him. In this way, in fairly numerous gatherings such as this, M. de Charlus kept almost continuously on show a smile without any definite direction or particular object, which, pre-existing before the greetings of new arrivals, found itself, when these entered its zone, devoid of any indication of friendliness towards them. Nevertheless, it was obviously my duty to go across and speak to Mme. Swann. But as she was not certain whether I already knew Mme. de Marsantes and M. de Charlus, she was distinctly cold, fearing no doubt that I might ask her to introduce me to them. I then made my way to M. de Charlus, and at once regretted it, for though he could not have helped seeing me he shewed no sign whatsoever. As I stood before him and bowed I found standing out from his body, which it prevented me from approaching by the full length of his outstretched arm, a finger widowed, one would have said, of an episcopal ring, of which he appeared to be offering, for the kiss of the faithful, the consecrated site, and I was made to appear to have penetrated, without leave from the Baron and by an act of trespass for which he would hold me permanently responsible, the anonymous and vacant dispersion of his smile. This coldness was hardly of a kind to encourage Mme. Swann to melt from hers.

"How tired and worried you look," said Mme. de Marsantes to her son who had come up to greet M. de Charlus.

And indeed the expression in Robert's eyes seemed every minute to reach a depth from which it rose at once like a diver who has touched bottom. This bottom which hurt Robert so when he touched it that he left it at once, to return to it a moment later, was the thought that he had quarrelled with his mistress.

"Never mind," his mother went on, stroking his cheek, "never mind; it's good to see my little boy again."

But this show of affection seeming to irritate Robert, Mme. de Marsantes led her son away to the other end of the room where in an alcove hung with yellow silk a group of Beauvais armchairs massed their violet-hued tapestries like purple irises in a field of buttercups. Mme. Swann, finding herself alone and having realised that I was a friend of Saint-Loup, beckoned to me to come and sit beside her. Not having seen her for so long I did not know what to talk to her about. I was keeping an eye on my hat, among the crowd of hats that littered the carpet, and I asked myself with a vague curiosity to whom one of them could belong which was not that of the Duc de Guermantes and yet in the lining of which a capital 'G' was surmounted by a ducal coronet. I knew who everyone in the room was, and could not think of anyone whose hat this could possibly be.

"What a pleasant man M. de Norpois is," I said to Mme. Swann, looking at the Ambassador. "It is true, Robert de Saint-Loup says he's a pest, but . . ."

"He is quite right," she replied.

Seeing from her face that she was thinking of something which she was keeping from me, I plied her with questions. For the satisfaction of appearing to be greatly taken up by some one in this room where she knew hardly anyone, she took me into a corner.

"I am sure this is what M. de Saint-Loup meant," she began, "but you must never tell him I said so, for he would think me indiscreet, and I value his esteem very highly; I am an 'honest Injun,' don't you know. The other day, Charlus was dining at the Princesse de Guermantes's; I don't know how it was, but your name was mentioned. M. de Norpois seems to have told them—it's all too silly for words, don't go and worry yourself to death over it, nobody paid any attention, they all knew only too well the mischievous tongue that said it—that you were a hypocritical little flatterer."

I have recorded a long way back my stupefaction at the discovery that a friend of my father, such as M. de Norpois was, could have expressed himself thus in speaking of me. I was even more astonished to learn that my emotion on that evening long ago when I had asked him about Mme. Swann and Gilberte was known to the Princesse de Guermantes, whom I imagined never to have heard of my existence. Each of our actions, our words, our attitudes is cut off from the 'world,' from the people who have not directly perceived it, by a medium the permeability of which is of infinite variation and remains unknown to ourselves; having learned by experience that some important utterance which we eagerly hoped would be disseminated (such as those so enthusiastic speeches which I used at one time to make to all comers and on every occasion on the subject of Mme. Swann) has found itself, often simply on account of our anxiety, immediately hidden under a bushel, how immeasurably less do we suppose that some tiny word, which we ourselves have forgotten, or else a word never uttered by us but formed on its course by the imperfect refraction of a different word, can be transported without ever halting for any obstacle to infinite distances—in the present instance to the Princesse de Guermantes—and succeed in diverting at our expense the banquet of the gods. What we actually recall of our conduct remains unknown to our nearest neighbour; what we have forgotten that we ever said, or indeed what we never did say, flies to provoke hilarity even in another planet, and the image that other people form of our actions and behaviour is no more like that which we form of them ourselves, than is like an original drawing a spoiled copy in which, at one point, for a black line, we find an empty gap, and for a blank space an unaccountable contour. It may be, all the same, that what has not been transcribed is some non-existent feature which we behold merely in our purblind self-esteem, and that what seems to us added is indeed a part of ourselves, but so essential a part as to have escaped our notice. So that this strange print which seems to us to have so little resemblance to ourselves bears sometimes the same stamp of truth, scarcely flattering, indeed, but profound and useful, as a photograph taken by X-rays. Not that that is any reason why we should recognise ourselves in it. A man who is in the habit of smiling in the glass at his handsome face and stalwart figure, if you shew him their radiograph, will have, face to face with that rosary of bones, labelled as being the image of himself, the same suspicion of error as the visitor to an art gallery who, on coming to the portrait of a girl, reads in his catalogue: "Dromedary resting." Later on, this discrepancy between our portraits, according as it was our own hand that drew them or another, I was to register in the case of others than myself, living placidly in the midst of a collection of photographs which they themselves had taken while round about them grinned frightful faces, invisible to them as a rule, but plunging them in stupor if an accident were to reveal them with the warning: "This is you."

A few years earlier I should have been only too glad to tell Mme. Swann in what connexion I had fawned upon M. de Norpois, since the connexion had been my desire to know her. But I no longer felt this desire, I was no longer in love with Gilberte. On the other hand I had not succeeded in identifying Mme. Swann with the lady in pink of my childhood. Accordingly I spoke of the woman who was on my mind at the moment.

"Did you see the Duchesse de Guermantes just now?" I asked Mme. Swann.

But since the Duchess did not bow to Mme. Swann when they met, the latter chose to appear to regard her as a person of no importance, whose presence in a room one did not even remark.

"I don't know; I didn't *realise* her," she replied sourly, using an expression borrowed from England.

I was anxious nevertheless for information with regard not only to Mme. de Guermantes but to all the people who came in contact with her, and (for all the world like Bloch), with the tactlessness of people who seek in their conversation not to give pleasure to others but to elucidate, from sheer egoism, facts that are interesting to themselves, in my effort to form an exact idea of the life of Mme. de Guermantes I questioned Mme. de Villeparisis about Mme. Leroi.

"Oh, yes, I know who' you mean," she replied with an affectation of contempt, "the daughter of those rich timber people. I've heard that she's begun to go about quite a lot lately, but I must explain to you that I am rather old now to make new acquaintances. I have known such interesting, such delightful people in my time that really I do not believe Mme. Leroi would be any addition to what I already have." Mme. de Marsantes, who was playing lady in waiting to the Marquise, presented me to the Prince, and, while she was still doing so, M. de Norpois also presented me in the most glowing terms. Perhaps he found it convenient to do me a courtesy which could in no way damage his credit since I had just been presented, perhaps it was because he thought that a foreigner, even so distinguished a foreigner, was unfamiliar with French society and might think that he was having introduced to him a young man of fashion, perhaps to exercise one of his prerogatives, that of adding the weight of his personal recommendation as an Ambassador, or in his taste for the archaic to revive in the Prince's honour the old custom, flattering to his rank, that two sponsors were necessary if one wished to be presented.

Mme. de Villeparisis appealed to M. de Norpois, feeling it imperative that I should have his assurance that she had nothing to regret in not knowing Mme. Leroi.

"Am I not right, M. l'Ambassadeur, Mme. Leroi is quite uninteresting, isn't she, quite out of keeping with the people who come here; I was quite right not to make friends with her, wasn't I?"

Whether from independence or because he was tired, M. de Norpois replied merely in a bow full of respect but devoid of meaning.

"Sir," went on Mme. de Villeparisis with a laugh, "there are some absurd people in the world. Would you believe that I had a visit this afternoon from a gentleman who tried to persuade me that he found more pleasure in kissing my hand than a young woman's?"

I guessed at once that this was Legrandin. M. de Norpois smiled with a slight quiver of the eyelid, as though such a remark had been prompted by a concupiscence so natural that one could not find fault with the person who had uttered it, almost as though it were the beginning of a romance which he was prepared to forgive, if not to encourage, with the perverse indulgence of a Voisenon or the younger Crébillon.

"Many young women's hands would be incapable of doing what I see there," said the Prince, pointing to Mme. de Villeparisis's unfinished watercolours. And he asked her whether she had seen the flower paintings by Fantin-Latour which had recently been exhibited.

"They are of the first order, and indicate, as people say nowadays, a fine painter, one of the masters of the palette," declared M. de Norpois; "I consider, all the same, that they stand no comparison with these, in which I find it easier to recognise the colouring of the flower."

Even supposing that the partiality of an old lover, the habit of flattering people, the critical standard admissible in a small circle, had dictated this speech to the ex-Ambassador, it proved upon what an absolute vacuum of true taste the judgment of people in society is based, so arbitrary that the smallest trifle can make it rush to the wildest absurdities, on the way to which it is stopped, held up by no genuinely felt impression.

"I claim no credit for knowing about flowers, I've lived all my life among the fields," replied Mme. de Villeparisis modestly. "But," she added graciously, turning to the Prince, "if I did, when I was quite a girl, form a rather more serious idea of them than children generally do in the country, I owe that to a distinguished fellow-countryman of yours, Herr von Schlegel. I met him at Broglie, when I was staying there once with my aunt Cordelia (Marshal de Castellane's wife, don't you know?). I remember so well M. Lebrun, M. de Salvandy, M. Doudan, getting him to talk about flowers. I was only a little girl, I wasn't able to follow all he said. But he liked playing with me, and when he went back to your country he sent me a beautiful botany book to remind me of a drive we took together in a phaeton to the Val Richer, when I fell asleep on his knee. I have got the book still, and it taught me to observe many things about flowers which I should not have noticed otherwise. When Mme. de Barante published some of Mme. de Broglie's letters, charming and affected like herself, I hoped to find among them some record of those conversations with Herr von Schlegel. But she was a woman who looked for nothing from nature but arguments in support of religion."

Robert called me away to the far end of the room where he and his mother were.

"You have been good to me," I said, "how can I thank you? Can we dine together to-morrow?"

"To-morrow? Yes, if you like, but it will have to be with Bloch. I met him just now on the doorstep; he was rather stiff with me at first because I had quite forgotten to answer his last two letters. (At least, he didn't tell me that that was what had annoyed him, but I guessed it.) But after that he was so friendly to me that I simply can't disappoint him. Between ourselves, on his side at least, I can feel it's a life and death friendship." Nor do I consider that Robert was altogether mistaken. Furious detraction was often, with Bloch, the effect of a keen affection which he had supposed to be unreturned. And as he had little power of imagining the lives of other people, and never dreamed that one might have been ill, or away from home, or otherwise occupied, a week's silence was at once interpreted by him as meaning a deliberate coldness. And so I have never believed that his most violent outbursts as a friend, or in later years as a writer, went very deep. They rose to a paroxysm if one replied to them with an icy dignity, or by a platitude which encouraged him to redouble his onslaught, but yielded often to a warmly sympathetic attitude. "As for being good," went on Saint-Loup, "you say I have been to you, but I haven't been good at all, my aunt tells me that it's you who avoid her, that you never said a word to her. She wondered whether you had anything against her."

Fortunately for myself, if I had been taken in by this speech, our departure, which I believed to be imminent, for Balbec would have prevented my making any attempt to see Mme. Guermantes again, to assure her that I had nothing against her, and so to put her under the necessity of proving that it was she who had something against me. But I had only to remind myself that she had not even offered to let me see her Elstirs. Besides, this was not a disappointment; I had never expected her to begin talking to me about them; I knew that I did not appeal to her, that I need have no hope of ever making her like me; the most that I had been able to look forward to was that, thanks to her kindness, I might there and then receive, since I should not be seeing her again before I left Paris, an entirely pleasing impression, which I could take with me to Balbec indefinitely prolonged, intact, instead of a memory broken by anxiety and sorrow.

Mme. de Marsantes kept on interrupting her conversation with Robert to tell me how often he had spoken to her about me, how fond he was of me; she treated me with a deference which almost hurt me because I felt it to be prompted by her fear of being embroiled, on my account, with this son whom she had not seen all day, with whom she was eager to be alone, and over whom she must accordingly have supposed that the influence which she wielded was not equal to and must conciliate mine. Having heard me, earlier in the afternoon, make some reference to Bloch's uncle, M. Nissim Bernard, Mme. de Marsantes inquired whether it was he who had at one time lived at Nice.

"In that case, he knew M. de Marsantes there before our marriage," she told me. "My husband used often to speak of him as an excellent man, with such a delicate, generous nature."

"To think that for once in his life he wasn't lying! It's incredible," would have been Bloch's comment.

All this time I should have liked to explain to Mme. de Marsantes that Robert felt infinitely more affection for her than for myself, and that had she shewn any hostility towards me it was not in my nature to attempt to set him against her, to detach him from her. But now that Mme. de Guermantes had left the room, I had more leisure to observe Robert, and I noticed then for the first time that, once again, a sort of flood of anger seemed to be coursing through him, rising to the surface of his stern and sombre features. I was afraid lest, remembering the scene in the theatre that afternoon, he might be feeling humiliated in my presence at having allowed himself to be treated so harshly by his mistress without making any rejoinder.

Suddenly he broke away from his mother, who had put her arm round his neck, and, coming towards me, led me behind the little flower-strewn counter at which Mme. de Villeparisis had resumed her seat, making a sign to me to follow him into the smaller room. I was hurrying after him when M. de Charlus, who must have supposed that I was leaving the house, turned abruptly from Prince von Faffenheim, to whom he had been talking, and made a rapid circuit which brought him face to face with me. I saw with alarm that he had taken the hat in the lining of which were a capital 'G' and a ducal coronet. In the doorway into the little room he said, without looking at me:

"As I see that you have taken to going into society, you must do me the pleasure of coming to see me. But it's a little complicated," he went on with a distracted, calculating air, as if the pleasure had been one that he was afraid of not securing again once he had let slip the opportunity of arranging with me the means by which it might be realised. "I am very seldom at home; you will have to write to me. But I should prefer to explain things to you more quietly. I am just going. Will you walk a short way with me? I shall only keep you a moment."

"You'd better take care, sir," I warned him; "you have picked up the wrong hat by mistake."

"Do you want to stop me taking my own hat?" I assumed, a similar mishap having recently occurred to myself, that someone else having taken his hat he had seized upon one at random, so as not to go home bare-headed, and that I had placed him in a difficulty by exposing his stratagem. I told him that I must say a few words to Saint-Loup. "He is still talking to that idiot the Duc de Guermantes," I added. "That really is charming; I shall tell my brother." "Oh! you think that would interest M. de Charlus?" (I imagined that, if he had a brother, that brother must be called Charlus also. Saint-Loup had indeed explained his family tree to me at Balbec, but I had forgotten the details.) "Who has been talking to you about M. de Charlus?" replied the Baron in an arrogant tone. "Go to Robert."

"I hear," he went on, "that you took part this morning in one of those orgies that he has with a woman who is disgracing him. You would do well to use your influence with him to make him realise the pain he is causing his poor mother, and all of us, by dragging our name in the dirt."

I should have liked to reply that at this degrading luncheon the conversation had been entirely about Emerson, Ibsen and Tolstoy, and that the young woman had lectured Robert to make him drink nothing but water. In the hope of bringing some balm to Robert, whose pride had, I felt, been wounded, I sought to find an excuse for his mistress. I did not know that at that moment, in spite of his anger with her, it was on himself that he was heaping reproaches. But it always happens, even in quarrels between a good man and a worthless woman, and when the right is all on one side, that some trifle crops up which enables the woman to appear not to have been in the wrong on one point. And as she ignores all the other points, the moment the man begins to feel the need of her company, or is demoralised by separation from her, his weakness will make his conscience more exacting, he will remember the absurd reproaches that have been flung at him and will ask himself whether they have not some foundation in fact.

"I've come to the conclusion I was wrong about that matter of the necklace," Robert said to me. "Of course, I never meant for a moment to do anything wrong, but, I know very well, other people don't look at things in the same way as oneself. She had a very hard time when she was young. In her eyes, I was bound to appear just the rich man who thinks he can get anything he wants with his money, and with whom a poor person cannot compete, whether in trying to influence Boucheron or in a lawsuit. Of course she has been horribly cruel to me, when I have never thought of anything but her good. But I do see clearly, she believes that I wanted to make her feel that one could keep a hold on her with money, and that's not true. And she's so fond of me; what must she be thinking of me? Poor darling, if you only knew, she has such charming ways, I simply can't tell you, she has often done the most adorable things for me. How wretched she must be feeling now! In any case, whatever happens in the long run, I don't want to let her think me a cad; I shall dash off to Boucheron's and get the necklace. You never know; very likely when she sees me with it, she will admit that she's been in the wrong. Don't you see, it's the idea that she is suffering at this moment that I can't bear. What one suffers oneself one knows; that's nothing. But with her—to say to oneself that she's suffering and not to be able to form any idea of what she feels—I think I shall go mad in a minute—I'd much rather never see her again than let her suffer. She can be happy without me, if she must; that's all I ask. Listen; you know, to me everything that concerns her is enormously important, it becomes something cosmic; I shall run to the jeweller's and then go and ask her to forgive me. But until I get down there what will she be thinking of me? If she could only know that I was on my way! What about your going down there and telling her? For all we know, that might settle the whole business. Perhaps," he went on with a smile, as though he hardly ventured to believe in so idyllic a possibility, "we can all three dine together in the country. But we can't tell yet. I never know how to handle her. Poor child. I shall perhaps only hurt her more than ever. Besides, her decision may be irrevocable."

Robert swept me back to his mother.

"Good-bye," he said to her. "I've got to go now. I don't know when I shall get leave again. Probably not for a month. I shall write as soon as I know myself."

Certainly Robert was not in the least of the type of son who, when he goes out with his mother, feels that an attitude of exasperation towards her ought to balance the smiles and bows which he bestows on strangers. Nothing is more common than this odious form of vengeance on the part of those who appear to believe that rudeness to one's own family is the natural complement to one's ceremonial behaviour. Whatever the wretched mother may say, her son, as though he had been taken to the house against his will and wished to make her pay dearly for his presence, refutes immediately, with an ironical, precise, cruel contradiction, the timidly ventured assertion; the mother at once conforms, though without thereby disarming him, to the opinion of this superior being of whom she will continue to boast to everyone, when he is not present, as having a charming nature, and who all the same spares her none of his keenest thrusts. Saint-Loup was not at all like this; but the anguish which Rachel's absence provoked in him brought it about that, for different reasons, he was no less harsh with his mother than the sons I have been describing are with theirs. And as she listened to him I saw the same throb, like that of a mighty wing, which Mme. de Marsantes had been unable to repress when her son first entered the room, convulse her whole body once again; but this time it was an anxious face, eyes wide with grief that she fastened on him.

"What, Robert, you're going away? Seriously? My little son! The one day I've seen anything of you!"

And then quite softly, in the most natural tone, in a voice from which she strove to banish all sadness so as not to inspire her son with a pity which would perhaps have been painful to him, or else useless and might serve only to irritate him, like an argument prompted by plain common sense she added:

"You know, it's not at all nice of you."

But to this simplicity she added so much timidity, to shew him that she was not trespassing on his freedom, so much affection, so that he should not reproach her with spoiling his pleasures, that Saint-Loup could not fail to observe in himself as it were the possibility of a similar wave of affection, that was to say an obstacle to his spending the evening with his lady. And so he grew angry.

"It's unfortunate, but, nice or not, that's how it is."

And he heaped on his mother the reproaches which no doubt he felt that he himself perhaps deserved; thus it is that egoists have always the last word; having laid down at the start that their determination is unshakeable, the more the sentiment in them to which one appeals to make them abandon it is touched, the more fault they find, not with themselves who resist the appeal but with those persons who put them under the necessity of resisting it, with the result that their own firmness may be carried to the utmost degree of cruelty, which only aggravates all the more in their eyes the culpability of the person who is so indelicate as to be hurt, to be in the right, and to cause them thus treacherously the pain of acting against their natural instinct of pity. But of her own accord Mme. de Marsantes ceased to insist, for she felt that she would not be able to keep him.

"I shall leave you here," he said to me, "but you're not to keep him long, Mamma, because he's got to go somewhere else in a minute."

I was fully aware that my company could not afford any pleasure to Mme. de Marsantes, but I preferred, by not going with Robert, not to let her suppose that I was involved in these pleasures which deprived her of him. I should have liked to find some excuse for her son's conduct, less from affection for him than from pity for her. But it was she who spoke first.

"Poor boy," she began, "I am sure I must have hurt him dreadfully. You see, Sir, mothers are such selfish creatures, after all he hasn't many pleasures, he comes so little to Paris. Oh, dear, if he hadn't gone already I should have liked to stop him, not to keep him of course, but just to tell him that I'm not vexed with him, that I think he was quite right. Will you excuse me if I go and look over the staircase?"

I accompanied her there.

"Robert! Robert!" she called. "No; he's gone; we are too late."

At that moment I would as gladly have undertaken a mission to make Robert break with his mistress as, a few hours earlier, to make him go and live with her altogether. In one case Saint-Loup would have regarded me as a false friend, in the other his family would have called me his evil genius. Yet I was the same man, at an interval of a few hours.

We returned to the drawing-room. Seeing that Saint-Loup was not with us, Mme. de Villeparisis exchanged with M. de Norpois that dubious, derisive and not too pitying glance with which people point out to one another an over-jealous wife or an over-loving mother (spectacles which to outsiders are amusing), as much as to say: "There now, there's been trouble."

Robert went to his mistress, taking with him the splendid ornament which, after what had been said on both sides, he ought not to have given her. But it came to the same thing, for she would not look at it, and even after their reconciliation he could never persuade her to accept it. Certain of Robert's friends thought that these proofs of disinterestedness which she furnished were deliberately planned to draw him closer to her. And yet she was not greedy about money, except perhaps to be able to spend it without thought. I have seen her bestow recklessly on people whom she believed to be in need the most insensate charity. "At this moment," Robert's friends would say to him, seeking to balance by their malicious words a disinterested action on Rachel's part, "at this moment she will be in the promenade at the Folies-Bergères. She's an enigma, that girl is, a regular sphinx." After all, how many women who are not disinterested, since they are kept by men, have we not seen, with a delicacy that flowers from their sordid existence, set with their own hands a thousand little limits to the generosity of their lovers?

Robert knew of scarcely any of the infidelities of his mistress, and tortured his mind over what were mere nothings compared with the real life of Rachel, a life which began every day only after he had left her. He knew of scarcely any of these infidelities. One could have told him of them without shaking his confidence in Rachel. For it is a charming law of nature which manifests itself in the heart of the most complex social organisms, that we live in perfect ignorance of those we love. On one side of the mirror the lover says to himself: "She is an angel, she will never yield herself to me, I may as well die—and yet she does care for me; she cares so much that perhaps—but no, it can never possibly happen." And in the exaltation of his desire, in the anguish of waiting, what jewels he flings at the feet of this woman, how he runs to borrow money to save her from inconvenience; meanwhile, on the other side of the screen, through which their conversation will no more carry than that which visitors exchange outside the glass wall of an aquarium, the public are saying: "You don't know her? I congratulate you, she has robbed, in fact ruined I don't know how many men. There isn't a worse girl in Paris. She's a common swindler. And cunning isn't the word!" And perhaps the public are not entirely wrong in their use of the last epithet, for indeed the sceptical man who is not really in love with the woman and whom she merely attracts says to his friends: "No, no, my dear fellow, she is not in the least a prostitute; I don't say she hasn't had an adventure or two in her time, but she's not a woman one pays, she'd be a damned sight too expensive if she was. With her it's fifty thousand francs or nothing." Well, he has spent fifty thousand francs on her, he has had her once, but she (finding, moreover, a willing accomplice in the man himself) has managed to persuade him that he is one of those who have had her for nothing. Such is society, in which every one of us has two aspects, in which the most obvious, the most notorious faults will never be known by a certain other person save embedded in, under the protection of a shell, a smooth cocoon, a delicious curiosity of nature. There were in Paris two thoroughly respectable men to whom Saint-Loup no longer bowed, and could not refer without a tremor in his voice, calling them exploiters of women: this was because they had both been ruined by Rachel.

"I blame myself for one thing only," Mme. de Marsantes murmured in my ear, "and that was my telling him that he wasn't nice to me. He, such an adorable, unique son, there's no one else like him in the world, the only time I see him, to have told him he wasn't nice to me, I would far rather he'd beaten me, because I am sure that whatever pleasure he may be having this evening, and he hasn't many, will be spoiled for him by that unfair word. But, Sir, I mustn't keep you, since you're in a hurry."

Anxiously, Mme. de Marsantes bade me good-bye. These sentiments bore upon Robert; she was sincere. But she ceased to be, to become a great lady once more.

"I have been so *interested,* so *glad* to have this little talk with you. Thank you! Thank you!"

And with a humble air she fastened on me a look of gratitude, of exhilaration, as though my conversation were one of the keenest pleasures that she had experienced in her life. These charming glances went very well with the black flowers on her white skirt; they were those of a great lady who knew her business.

"But I am in no hurry," I replied; "besides, I must wait for M. de Charlus; I am going with him."

Mme. de Villeparisis overheard these last words. They appeared to vex her. Had the matter in question not been one which could not possibly give rise to such a sentiment, it might have struck me that what seemed to be at that moment alarmed in Mme. de Villeparisis was her modesty. But this hypothesis never even entered my mind. I was delighted with Mme. de Guermantes, with Saint-Loup, with Mme. de Marsantes, with M. de Charlus, with Mme. de Villeparisis; I did not stop to reflect, and I spoke light-heartedly and at random.

"You're going from here with my nephew Palamède?" she asked me.

Thinking that it might produce a highly favourable impression on Mme. de Villeparisis if she learned that I was on intimate terms with a nephew whom she esteemed so greatly, "He has asked me to go home with him," I answered blithely. "I am so glad. Besides, we are greater friends than you think, and I've quite made up my mind that we're going to be better friends still."

From being vexed, Mme. de Villeparisis seemed to have grown anxious. "Don't wait for him," she said to me, with a preoccupied air. "He is talking to M. de Faffenheim. He's certain to have forgotten what he said to you. You'd much better go, now, quickly, while his back is turned."

The first emotion shewn by Mme. de Villeparisis would have suggested, but for the circumstances, offended modesty. Her insistence, her opposition might well, if one had studied her face alone, have appeared to be dictated by virtue. I was not, myself, in any hurry to join Robert and his mistress. But Mme. de Villeparisis seemed to make such a point of my going that, thinking perhaps that she had some important business to discuss with her nephew, I bade her good-bye. Next to her M. de Guermantes, superb and

Olympian, was ponderously seated. One would have said that the notion, omnipresent in all his members, of his vast riches gave him a particular high density, as though they had been melted in a crucible into a single human ingot to form this man whose value was so immense. At the moment of my saying good-bye to him he rose politely from his seat, and I could feel the dead weight of thirty millions which his old-fashioned French breeding set in motion, raised, until it stood before me. I seemed to be looking at that statue of Olympian Zeus which Phidias is said to have cast in solid gold. Such was the power that good breeding had over M. de Guermantes, over the body of M. de Guermantes at least, for it had not an equal mastery over the ducal mind. M. de Guermantes laughed at his own jokes, but did not unbend to other people's.

As I went downstairs I heard behind me a voice calling out to me:

"So this is how you wait for me, is it?"

It was M. de Charlus.

"You don't mind if we go a little way on foot?" he asked dryly, when we were in the courtyard. "We can walk until I find a cab that suits me."

"You wished to speak to me about something, Sir?"

"Oh yes, as a matter of fact there were some things I wished to say to you, but I am not so sure now whether I shall. As far as you are concerned, I am sure that they might be the starting-point which would lead you to inestimable benefits. But I can see also that they would bring into my existence, at an age when one begins to value tranquillity, a great loss of time, great inconvenience. I ask myself whether you are worth all the pains that I should have to take with you, and I have not the pleasure of knowing you well enough to be able to say. Perhaps also to you yourself what I could do for you does not appear sufficiently attractive for me to give myself so much trouble, for I repeat quite frankly that for me it can only be trouble."

I protested that, in that case, he must not dream of it. This summary end to the discussion did not seem to be to his liking.

"That sort of politeness means nothing," he rebuked me coldly. "There is nothing so pleasant as to give oneself trouble for a person who is worth one's while. For the best of us, the study of the arts, a taste for old things, collections, gardens are all mere *ersatz, succedanea,* alibis. In the heart of our tub, like Diogenes, we cry out for a man. We cultivate begonias, we trim yews, as a last resort, because yews and begonias submit to treatment. But we should like to give our time to a plant of human growth, if we were sure that he was worth the trouble. That is the whole question: you must know something about yourself. Are you worth my trouble or not?"

"I would not for anything in the world, Sir, be a cause of anxiety to you," I said to him, "but so far as I am concerned you may be sure that everything which comes to me from you will be a very great pleasure to me. I am deeply touched that you should be so kind as to take notice of me in this way and try to help me."

Greatly to my surprise, it was almost with effusion that he thanked me for this speech, slipping his arm through mine with that intermittent familiarity which had already struck me at Balbec, and was in such contrast to the coldness of his tone.

"With the want of consideration common at your age," he told me, "you are liable to say things at times which would open an unbridgeable gulf between us. What you have said just now, on the other hand, is exactly the sort of thing that touches me, and makes me want to do a great deal for you."

As he walked arm in arm with me and uttered these words, which, albeit tinged with contempt, were so affectionate, M. de Charlus now fastened his gaze on me with that intense fixity which had struck me the first morning, when I saw him outside the casino at Balbec, and indeed many years before that, through the pink hawthorns, standing beside Mme. Swann, whom I supposed then to be his mistress, in the park at Tansonville; now let it stray around him and examine the cabs which at this time of the day were passing in considerable numbers on the way to their stables, looking so determinedly at them that several stopped, the drivers supposing that he wished to engage them. But M. de Charlus immediately dismissed them.

"They're not what I want," he explained to me, "it's all a question of the colour of their lamps, and the direction they're going in. I hope, Sir," he went on, "that you will not in any way misinterpret the purely disinterested and charitable nature of the proposal which I am going to make to you."

I was struck by the similarity of his diction to Swann's, closer now than at Balbec.

"You have enough intelligence, I suppose, not to imagine that it is from want of society, from any fear of solitude and boredom that I have recourse to you. I do not, as a rule, care to talk about myself, but you may possibly have heard—it was alluded to in a leading article in *The Times,* which made a considerable impression—that the Emperor of Austria, who has always honoured me with his friendship, and is good enough to insist on keeping up terms of cousinship with me, declared the other day in an interview which was made public that if the Comte de Chambord had had by his side a man as thoroughly conversant with the undercurrents of European politics as myself he would be King of France to-day. I have often thought, Sir, that there was in me, thanks not to my own humble talents but to circumstances which you may one day have occasion to learn, a sort of secret record of incalculable value, of which I have not felt myself at liberty to make use, personally, but which would be a priceless acquisition to a young man to whom I would hand over in a few months what it has taken me more than thirty years to collect, what I am perhaps alone in possessing. I do not speak of the intellectual enjoyment which you would find in learning certain secrets which a Michelet of our day would give years of his life to know, and in the light of which certain events would assume for him an entirely different aspect. And I do not speak only of events that have already occurred, but of the chain of circumstances." (This was a favourite expression with M. de Charlus, and often, when he used it, he joined his hands as if in prayer, but with his fingers stiffened, as though to illustrate by their complexity the said circumstances, which he did not specify, and the chain that linked them.) "I could give you an explanation that no one has dreamed of, not only of the past but of the future." M. de Charlus broke off to question me about Bloch, whom he had heard discussed, though without appearing to be listening, in his aunt's drawing-room. And with that ironical accent he so skilfully detached what he was saying that he seemed to be thinking of something else altogether, and to be speaking mechanically, simply out of politeness. He asked if my friend was young, good looking and so forth. Bloch, if he had heard him, would have been more puzzled even than with M. de Norpois, but for very different reasons, to know whether M. de Charlus was for or against Dreyfus. "It is not a bad idea, if you wish to learn about life," went on M. de Charlus when he had finished questioning me, "to include among your friends an occasional foreigner." I replied that Bloch was French. "Indeed," said M. de Charlus, "I took him to be a Jew." His assertion of this incompatibility made me suppose that M. de Charlus was more anti-Dreyfusard than anyone I had met. He protested, however, against the charge of treason levelled against Dreyfus. But his protest took this form: "I understand the newspapers to say that Dreyfus has committed a crime against his country—so I understand, I pay no attention to the newspapers, I read them as I wash my hands, without finding that it is worth my while to take any interest in what I am doing. In any case, the crime is non-existent, your friend's compatriot would have committed a crime if he had betrayed Judaea, but what has he to do with France?" I pointed out that if there should be a war the Jews would be mobilised just as much as anyone else. "Perhaps so, and I am not sure that it would not be an imprudence. If we bring over Senegalese and Malagasies, I hardly suppose that their hearts will be in the task of defending France, which is only natural. Your Dreyfus might rather be convicted of a breach of the laws of hospitality. But we need not discuss that. Perhaps you could ask your friend to allow me to be present at some great festival in the Temple, at a circumcision, with Jewish chants. He might perhaps take a hall, and give me some biblical entertainment, as the young ladies of Saint-Cyr performed scenes taken from the Psalms by Racine, to amuse Louis XIV. You might even arrange parties to give us a good laugh. For instance a battle between your friend and his father, in which he would smite him as David smote Goliath. That would make quite an amusing farce. He might even, while he was about it, deal some stout blows at his hag (or, as my old nurse would say, his 'haggart') of a mother. That would be an excellent show, and would not be unpleasing to us, eh, my young friend, since we like exotic spectacles, and to thrash that non-European creature would be giving a well-earned punishment to an old camel." As he poured out this terrible, almost insane language, M. de Charlus squeezed my arm until it ached. I reminded myself of all that his family had told me of his wonderful kindness to this old nurse, whose Molièresque vocabulary he had just quoted, and thought to myself that the connexions, hitherto, I felt, little studied, between goodness and wickedness in the same heart, various as they might be, would be an interesting subject for research.

I warned him that, anyhow, Mme. Bloch no longer existed, while as for M. Bloch, I questioned to what extent he would enjoy a sport which might easily result in his being blinded. M. de Charlus seemed annoyed. "That," he said, "is a woman who made a great mistake in dying. As for blinding him, surely the Synagogue is blind, it does not perceive the truth of the Gospel. In any case, think, at this moment, when all these unhappy Jews are trembling before the stupid fury of the Christians, what an honour it would be for him to see a man like myself condescend to be amused by their sports." At this point I caught sight of M. Bloch senior, who was coming towards us, probably on his way to meet his son. He did not see us, but I offered to introduce him to M. de Charlus. I had no conception of the torrent of rage which my words were to let loose. "Introduce him to me! But you must have singularly little idea of social values! People do not get to know me as easily as that. In the present instance, the awkwardness would be twofold, on account of the youth of the introducer and the unworthiness of the person introduced. At the most, if I am ever permitted to enjoy the Asiatic spectacle which I suggested to you, I might address to the horrible creature a few words indicative of generous feeling. But on condition that he allows himself to be thoroughly thrashed by his son, I might go so far as to express my satisfaction." As it happened, M. Bloch paid no attention to us. He was occupied in greeting Mme. Sazerat with a series of sweeping bows, which were very favourably received. I was surprised at this, for in the old days at Combray she had been indignant at my parents for having young Bloch in the house, so anti-semitic was she then. But Dreyfusism, like a strong gust of wind, had, a few days before this, wafted M. Bloch to her feet. My father's friend had found Mme. Sazerat charming and was particularly gratified by the anti-semitism of the lady, which he regarded as a proof of the sincerity of her faith and the soundness of her Dreyfusard opinions, and also as enhancing the value of the call which she had authorised him to pay her. He had not even been offended when she had said to him stolidly: "M. Drumont has the impudence to put the Revisionists in the same bag as the Protestants and the Jews. A delightful promiscuity!" "Bernard," he had said with pride, on reaching home, to M. Nissim Bernard, "you know, she has that prejudice!" But M. Nissim Bernard had said nothing, only raising his eyes to heaven in an angelic gaze. Saddened by the misfortunes of the Jews, remembering his old friendships with Christians, grown mannered and precious with increasing years, for reasons which the reader will learn in due course, he had now the air of a pre-Raphaelite ghost on to which hair had been incongruously grafted, like threads in the heart of an opal. "All this Dreyfus business," went on the Baron, still clasping me by the arm, "has only one drawback. It destroys society (I do not say polite society; society has long ceased to deserve that laudatory epithet) by the influx of Mr. and Mrs. Camels and Camelries and Camelyards, astonishing creatures whom I find even in the houses of my own cousins, because they belong to the Patrie Française, or the Anti-Jewish, or some such league, as if a political opinion entitled one to any social qualification." This frivolity in M. de Charlus brought out his family likeness to the Duchesse de Guermantes. I remarked to him on the resemblance. As he appeared to think that I did not know her, I reminded him of the evening at the Opera when he had seemed to be trying to avoid me. He assured me with such insistence that he had never even seen me there that I should have begun to believe him, if presently a trifling incident had not led me to think that M. de Charlus, in his excessive pride perhaps, did not care to be seen with me.

"Let us return to yourself," he said, "and my plans for you. There exists among certain men, Sir, a freemasonry of which I cannot now say more than that it numbers in its ranks four of the reigning sovereigns of Europe. Now, the courtiers of one of these are trying to cure him of his fancy. That is a very serious matter, and may bring us to war. Yes, Sir, that is a fact. You remember the story of the man who believed that he had the Princess of China shut up in a bottle. It was a form of insanity. He was cured of it. But as soon as he ceased to be mad he became merely stupid. There are maladies which we must not seek to cure because they alone protect us from others that are more serious. A cousin of mine had trouble with his stomach; he could not digest anything. The most learned specialists on the stomach treated him, with no effect. I took him to a certain doctor (another highly interesting man, by the way, of whom I could tell you a great deal). He guessed at once that the trouble was nervousness; he persuaded his patient, ordered him to eat whatever he liked quite boldly and assured him that his digestion would stand it. But my cousin had nephritis also. What the stomach can digest perfectly well the kidneys cease, after a time, to eliminate, and my cousin, instead of living to a good old age with an imaginary disease of the stomach which obliged him to keep to a diet, died at forty with his stomach cured but his kidneys ruined. Given a very considerable advantage over people of your age, for all one knows, you will perhaps become what some eminent man of the past might have been if a good angel had revealed to him, in the midst of a humanity that knew nothing of them, the secrets of steam and electricity. Do not be foolish, do not refuse from discretion. Understand that, if I do you a great service, I expect my reward from you to be no less great. It is many years now since people in society ceased to interest me. I have but one passion left, to seek to redeem the mistakes of my life by conferring the benefit of my knowledge on a soul that is still virgin and capable of being inflamed by virtue. I have had great sorrows, Sir, of which I may tell you perhaps some day; I have lost my wife, who was the loveliest, the noblest, the most perfect creature that one could dream of seeing. I have young relatives who are not—I do not say worthy, but who are not capable of accepting the moral heritage of which I have been speaking. For all I know, you may be he into whose hands it is to pass, he whose life I shall be able to direct and to raise to so lofty a plane. My own would gain in return. Perhaps in teaching you the great secrets of diplomacy I might recover a taste for them myself, and begin at last to do things of real interest in which you would have an equal share. But before I can tell I must see you often, very often, every day."

I was thinking of taking advantage of this unexpected kindness on M. de Charlus's part to ask him whether he could not arrange for me to meet his sister-in-law when, suddenly, I felt my arm violently jerked, as though by an electric shock. It was M. de Charlus who had hurriedly withdrawn his arm from mine. Although as he talked he had allowed his eyes to wander in all directions he had only just caught sight of M. d'Argencourt, who was coming towards us from a side street. On seeing us, M. d'Argencourt appeared worried, cast at me a look of distrust, almost that look intended for a creature of another race than one's own with which Mme. de Guermantes had quizzed Bloch, and tried to avoid us. But one would have said that M. de Charlus was determined to shew him that he was not at all anxious not to be seen by him, for he called to him, simply to tell him something that was of no importance. And fearing perhaps that M. d'Argencourt had not recognised me, M. de Charlus informed him that I was a great friend of Mme. de Villeparisis, of the Duchesse de Guermantes, of Robert de Saint-Loup, and that he himself, Charlus, was an old friend of my grandmother, and glad to be able to shew her grandson a little of the affection that he felt for her. Nevertheless I observed that M. d'Argencourt, albeit I had barely been introduced to him at Mme. de Villeparisis's, and M. de Charlus had now spoken to him at great length about my family, was distinctly colder to me than he had been in the afternoon; and for a long time he shewed the same aloofness whenever we met. He watched me now with a curiosity in which there was no sign of friendliness, and seemed even to have to overcome an instinctive repulsion when, on leaving us, after a moment's hesitation, he held out a hand to me which he at once withdrew.

"I am sorry about that," said M. de Charlus. "That fellow Argencourt, well born but ill bred, more than feeble as a diplomat, an impossible husband, always running after women like a person in a play, is one of those men who are incapable of understanding but perfectly capable of destroying the things in life that are really great. I hope that our friendship will be one of them, if it is ever to be formed, and I hope also that you will honour me by keeping it—as I shall—well clear of the heels of any of those donkeys who, from idleness or clumsiness or deliberate wickedness trample upon what would seem to have been made to endure. Unfortunately, that is the mould in which most of the men one meets have been cast."

"The Duchesse de Guermantes seems to be very clever. We were talking this afternoon about the possibility of war. It appears that she is specially well informed on that subject."

"She is nothing of the sort," replied M. de Charlus tartly. "Women, and most men, for that matter, understand nothing of what I was going to tell you. My sister-in-law is a charming woman who imagines that we are still living in the days of Balzac's novels, when women had an influence on politics. Going to her house could at present have only a bad effect on you, as for that matter going anywhere. That was one of the very things I was just going to tell you when that fool interrupted me. The first sacrifice that you must make for me—I shall claim them from you in proportion to the gifts I bestow on you—is to give up going into society. It distressed me this afternoon to see you at that idiotic tea-party. You may remind me that I was there myself, but for me it was not a social gathering, it was simply a family visit. Later on, when you have established your position, if it amuses you to step down for a little into that sort of thing, it may, perhaps, do no harm. And then, I need not point out how invaluable I can be to you. The 'Open Sesame' to the Guermantes house and any others that it is worth while throwing open the doors of to you, rests with me. I shall be the judge, and intend to remain master of the situation."

I thought I would take advantage of what M. de Charlus had said about my call on Mme. de Villeparisis to try to find out what position exactly she occupied in society, but the question took another form on my lips than I had intended, and I asked him instead what the Villeparisis family was.

"That is absolutely as though you had asked me what the Nobody family was," replied M. de Charlus. "My aunt married, for love, a M. Thirion, who was extremely rich, for that matter, and whose sisters had married surprisingly well; and from that day onwards he called himself Marquis de Villeparisis. It did no harm to anyone, at the most a little to himself, and very little! What his reason was I cannot tell; I suppose he was actually a 'Monsieur de Villeparisis,' a gentleman born at Villeparisis, which as you know is the name of a little place outside Paris. My aunt tried to make out that there was such a Marquisate in the family, she wanted to put things on a proper footing; I can't tell you why. When one takes a name to which one has no right it is better not to copy the regular forms."

Mme. de Villeparisis being merely Mme. Thirion completed the fall which had begun in my estimation of her when I had seen the composite nature of her party. I felt it to be unfair that a woman whose title and name were of quite recent origin should be able thus to impose upon her contemporaries, with the prospect of similarly imposing upon posterity, by virtue of her friendships with royal personages. Now that she had become once again what I had supposed her to be in my childhood, a person who had nothing aristocratic about her, these distinguished kinsfolk who gathered round her seemed to remain alien to her. She did not cease to be charming to us all. I went occasionally to see her and she sent me little presents from time to time. But I had never any impression that she belonged to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and if I had wanted any information about it she would have been one of the last people to whom I should have applied.

"At present," went on M. de Charlus, "by going into society, you will only damage your position, warp your intellect and character. Also, you must be particularly careful in choosing your friends. Keep mistresses, if your family have no objection, that doesn't concern me, indeed I can only advise it, you young rascal, young rascal who will soon have to start shaving," he rallied me, passing his fingers over my chin. "But the choice of your men friends is more important. Eight out of ten young men are little scoundrels, little wretches capable of doing you an injury which you will never be able to repair. Wait, now, my nephew Saint-Loup is quite a suitable companion for you, at a pinch. As far as your future is concerned, he can be of no possible use to you, but for that I am sufficient. And really, when all's said and done, as a person to go about with, at times when you have had enough of me, he does not seem to present any serious drawback that I know of. At any rate he is a man, not one of those effeminate creatures one sees so many of nowadays, who look like little renters, and at any moment may bring their innocent victims to the gallows." I did not know the meaning of this slang word 'renter'; anyone who had known it would have been as greatly surprised by his use of it as myself. People in society always like talking slang, and people against whom certain things may be hinted like to shew that they are not afraid to mention them. A proof of innocence in their eyes. But they have lost their sense of proportion, they are no longer capable of realising the point at which a certain pleasantry will become too technical, too shocking, will be a proof rather of corruption than of simplicity. "He is not like the rest of them; he has nice manners; he is really serious."

I could not help smiling at this epithet 'serious,' to which the intonation that M. de Charlus gave to it seemed to impart the sense of 'virtuous,' of 'steady,' as one says of a little shop-girl that she is 'serious.' At this moment a cab passed, zigzagging along the street; a young cabman, who had deserted his box, was driving it from inside, where he lay sprawling upon the cushions, apparently half drunk. M. de Charlus instantly stopped him. The driver began to argue.

"Which way are you going?"

"Yours." This surprised me, for M. de Charlus had already refused several cabs with similarly coloured lamps.

"Well, I don't want to get up on the box. D'you mind if I stay down here?"

"No; but you must put down the hood. Well, think over my proposal," said M. de Charlus, preparing to leave me, "I give you a few days to consider my offer; write to me. I repeat, I shall need to see you every day, and to receive from you guarantees of loyalty, of discretion which, for that matter, you do appear, I must say, to furnish. But in the course of my life I have been so often taken in by appearances that I never wish to trust them again. Damn it, it's the least you can expect that before giving up a treasure I should know into what hands it is going to pass. Very well, bear in mind what I'm offering you; you are like Hercules (though, unfortunately for yourself, you do not appear to me to have quite his muscular development) at the parting of the ways. Try not to have to regret all your life not having chosen the way that leads to virtue. Hallo!" he turned to the cabman, "haven't you put the hood down? I'll do it myself. I think, too, I'd better drive, seeing the state you appear to be in."

He jumped in beside the cabman, took the reins, and the horse trotted off.

As for myself, no sooner had I turned in at our gate than I found the pendant to the conversation which I had heard exchanged that afternoon between Bloch and M. de Norpois, but in another form, brief, inverted and cruel. This was a dispute between our butler, who believed in Dreyfus, and the Guermantes', who was an anti-Dreyfusard. The truths and countertruths which came in conflict above ground, among the intellectuals of the rival Leagues, the Patrie Française and the Droits de l'Homme, were fast spreading downwards into the subsoil of popular opinion. M. Reinach was manipulating, by appeals to sentiment, people whom he had never seen, while for himself the Dreyfus case simply presented itself to his reason as an incontrovertible theory which he proved in the sequel by the most astonishing victory for rational policy (a victory against France, according to some) that the world has ever seen. In two years he replaced a Billot by a Clemenceau Ministry, revolutionised public opinion from top to bottom, took Picquart from his prison to install him, ungrateful, in the Ministry of War. Perhaps this rationalist manipulator of crowds was himself the puppet of his ancestry. When we find that the systems of philosophy which contain the most truths were dictated to their authors, in the last analysis, by reasons of sentiment, how are we to suppose that in a simple affair of politics like the Dreyfus case reasons of this order may not, unknown to the reasoner, have controlled his reason. Bloch believed himself to have been led by a logical sequence to choose Dreyfusism, yet he knew that his nose, skin and hair had been imposed on him by his race. Doubtless the reason enjoys more freedom; yet it obeys certain laws which it has not prescribed for itself. The case of the Guermantes' butler and our own was peculiar. The waves of the two currents of Dreyfusism and anti-Dreyfusism which now divided France from end to end were, on the whole, silent, but the occasional echoes which they emitted were sincere. When you heard anyone in the middle of a conversation which was being deliberately kept off the Case announce furtively some piece of political news, generally false, but always with a hopefulness of its truth, you could induce from the nature of his predictions where his heart lay. Thus there came into conflict on certain points, on one side a timid apostolate, on the other a righteous indignation. The two butlers whom I heard arguing as I came in furnished an exception to the rule. Ours let it be understood that Dreyfus was guilty, the Guermantes' butler that he was innocent. This was done not to conceal their personal convictions, but from cunning, and in the keenness of their rivalry. Our butler, being uncertain whether the fresh trial would be ordered, wished beforehand, in the event of failure, to deprive the Duke's butler of the joy of seeing a just cause vanquished. The Duke's butler thought that, in the event of a refusal, ours would be more indignant at the detention on the Devil's Isle of an innocent man. The porter looked on. I had the impression that it was not he who was the cause of dissension in the Guermantes household.

I went upstairs, and found my grandmother not so well. For some time past, without knowing exactly what was wrong, she had been complaining of her health. It is in moments of illness that we are compelled to recognise that we live not alone but chained to a creature of a different kingdom, whole worlds apart, who has no knowledge of us and by whom it is impossible to make ourselves understood: our body. Say that we met a brigand by the way; we might yet convince him by an appeal to his personal interest, if not to our own plight. But to ask pity of our body is like discoursing before an octopus, for which our words can have no more meaning than the sound of the tides, and with which we should be appalled to find ourselves condemned to live. My grandmother's attacks passed, often enough, unnoticed by the attention which she kept always diverted to ourselves. When the pain was severe, in the hope of curing it, she would try in vain to understand what the trouble was. If the morbid phenomena of which her body was the theatre remained obscure and beyond the reach of her mind, they were clear and intelligible to certain creatures belonging to the same natural kingdom as themselves, creatures to which the human mind has learned gradually to have recourse in order to understand what the body is saying to it, as when a foreigner accosts us we try to find some one belonging to his country who will act as interpreter. These can talk to our body, and tell us if its anger is serious or will soon be appeased. Cottard, whom we had called in to see my grandmother, and who had infuriated us by asking with a dry smile, the moment we told him that she was ill: "Ill? You're sure it's not what they call a diplomatic illness?" He tried to soothe his patient's restlessness by a milk diet. But incessant bowls of milk soup gave her no relief, because my grandmother sprinkled them liberally with salt (the toxic effects of which were as yet, Widal not having made his discoveries, unknown). For, medicine being a compendium of the successive and contradictory mistakes of medical practioners, when we summon the wisest of them to our aid, the chances are that we may be relying on a scientific truth the error of which will be recognised in a few years' time. So that to believe in medicine would be the height of folly, if not to believe in it were not greater folly still, for from this mass of errors there have emerged in the course of time many truths. Cottard had told us to take her temperature. A thermometer was fetched. Throughout almost all its length it was clear of mercury. Scarcely could one make out, crouching at the foot of the tube, in its little cell, the silver salamander. It seemed dead. The glass reed was slipped into my grandmother's mouth. We had no need to leave it there for long; the little sorceress had not been slow in casting her horoscope. We found her motionless, perched half-way up her tower, and declining to move, shewing us with precision the figure that we had asked of her, a figure with which all the most careful examination that my grandmother's mind could have devoted to herself would have been incapable of furnishing her: 101 degrees. For the first time we felt some anxiety. We shook the thermometer well, to erase the ominous line, as though we were able thus to reduce the patient's fever simultaneously with the figure shewn on the scale. Alas, it was only too clear that the little sibyl, unreasoning as she was, had not pronounced judgment arbitrarily, for the next day, scarcely had the thermometer been inserted between my grandmother's lips when almost at once, as though with a single bound, exulting in her certainty and in her intuition of a fact that to us was imperceptible, the little prophetess had come to a halt at the same point, in an implacable immobility, and pointed once again to that figure 101 with the tip of her gleaming wand. Nothing more did she tell us; in vain might we long, seek, pray, she was deaf to our entreaties; it seemed as though this were her final utterance, a warning and a menace. Then, in an attempt to constrain her to modify her response, we had recourse to another creature of the same kingdom, but more potent, which is not content with questioning the body but can command it, a febrifuge of the same order as the modern aspirin, which had not then come into use. We had not shaken the thermometer down below 99.5, and hoped that it would not have to rise from there. We made my grandmother swallow this drug and then replaced the thermometer in her mouth. Like an implacable warder to whom one presents a permit signed by a higher authority whose protecting influence one has sought, and who, finding it to be in order, replies: "Very well; I have nothing to say; if it's like that you may pass," this time the watcher in the tower did not move. But sullenly she seemed to be saying: "What use will that be to you? Since you are friends with quinine, she may give me the order not to go up, once, ten times, twenty times. And then she will grow tired of telling me, I know her; get along with you. This won't last for ever. And then you'll be a lot better off." Thereupon my grandmother felt the presence within her of a creature which knew the human body better than herself, the presence of a contemporary of the races that have vanished from the earth, the presence of earth's first inhabitant—long anterior to the creation of thinking man—she felt that aeonial ally who was sounding her, a little roughly even, in the head, the heart, the elbow; he found out the weak places, organised everything for the prehistoric combat which began at once to be fought. In a moment a trampled Python, the fever, was vanquished by the potent chemical substance to which my grandmother, across the series of kingdoms, reaching out beyond all animal and vegetable life, would fain have been able to give thanks. And she remained moved by this glimpse which she had caught, through the mists of so many centuries, of a climate anterior to the creation even of plants. Meanwhile the thermometer, like a Weird Sister momentarily vanquished by some more ancient god, held motionless her silver spindle. Alas! other inferior creatures which man has trained to the chase of the mysterious quarry which he cannot pursue within the pathless forest of himself, reported cruelly to us every day a certain quantity of albumen, not large, but constant enough for it also to appear to bear relation to some persistent malady which we could not detect. Bergotte had shocked that scrupulous instinct in me which made me subordinate my intellect when he spoke to me of Dr. du Boulbon as of a physician who would not bore me, who would discover methods of treatment which, however strange they might appear, would adapt themselves to the singularity of my mind. But ideas transform themselves in us, they overcome the resistance with which we at first meet them, and feed upon rich intellectual reserves which we did not know to have been prepared for them. So, as happens whenever anything we have heard said about some one whom we do not know has had the faculty of awakening in us the idea of great talent, of a sort of genius, in my inmost mind I gave Dr. du Boulbon the benefit of that unlimited confidence which he inspires in us who with an eye more penetrating than other men's perceives the truth. I knew indeed that he was more of a specialist in nervous diseases, the man to whom Charcot before his death had predicted that he would reign supreme in neurology and psychiatry. "Ah! I don't know about that. It's quite possible," put in Françoise, who was in the room, and heard Charcot's name, as she heard du Boulbon's, for the first time. But this in no way prevented her from saying "It's possible." Her 'possibles,' her 'perhapses,' her 'I don't knows' were peculiarly irritating at such a moment. One wanted to say to her: "Naturally you don't know, since you haven't the faintest idea of what we are talking about, how can you even say whether it's possible or not; you know nothing about it. Anyhow, you can't say now that you don't know what Charcot said to du Boulbon. You do know because we have just told you, and your 'perhapses' and 'possibles' don't come in, because it's a fact."

In spite of this more special competence in cerebral and nervous matters, as I knew that du Boulbon was a great physician, a superior man, of a profound and inventive intellect, I begged my mother to send for him, and the hope that, by a clear perception of the malady, he might perhaps cure it, carried the day finally over the fear that we had of (if we called in a specialist) alarming my grandmother. What decided my mother was the fact that, encouraged unconsciously by Cottard, my grandmother no longer went out of doors, and scarcely rose from her bed. In vain might she answer us in the words of Mme. de Sévigné's letter on Mme. de la Fayette: "Everyone said she was mad not to wish to go out. I said to these persons, so headstrong in their judgment: 'Mme. de la Fayette is not mad!' and I stuck to that. It has taken her death to prove that she was quite right not to go out." Du Boulbon when he came decided against—if not Mme. de Sévigné, whom we did not quote to him—my grandmother, at any rate. Instead of sounding her chest, fixing on her steadily his wonderful eyes, in which there was perhaps the illusion that he was making a profound scrutiny of his patient, or the desire to give her that illusion, which seemed spontaneous but must be mechanically produced, or else not to let her see that he was thinking of something quite different, or simply to obtain the mastery over her, he began talking about Bergotte.

"I should think so, indeed, he's magnificent, you are quite right to admire him. But which of his books do you prefer? Indeed! Well, perhaps that is the best after all. In any case it is the best composed of his novels. Claire is quite charming in it; of his male characters which appeals to you most?"

I supposed at first that he was making her talk like this about literature because he himself found medicine boring, perhaps also to display his breadth of mind and even, with a more therapeutic aim, to restore confidence to his patient, to shew her that he was not alarmed, to take her mind from the state of her health. But afterwards I realised that, being distinguished particularly as an alienist and by his work on the brain, he had been seeking to ascertain by these questions whether my grandmother's memory was in good order. As though reluctantly he began to inquire about her past life, fixing a stern and sombre eye on her. Then suddenly, as though catching sight of the truth and determined to reach it at all costs, with a preliminary rubbing of his hands, which he seemed to have some difficulty in wiping dry of the final hesitations which he himself might feel and of all the objections which we might have raised, looking down at my grandmother with a lucid eye, boldly and as though he were at last upon solid ground, punctuating his words in a quiet, impressive tone, every inflexion of which bore the mark of intellect, he began. (His voice, for that matter, throughout this visit remained what it naturally was, caressing. And under his bushy brows his ironical eyes were full of kindness.)

"You will be quite well, Madame, on the day—when it comes, and it rests entirely with you whether it comes to-day—on which you realise that there is nothing wrong with you, and resume your ordinary life. You tell me that you have not been taking your food, not going out?"

"But, Sir, I have a temperature."

He laid a finger on her wrist.

"Not just now, at any rate. Besides, what an excuse! Don't you know that we keep out in the open air and overfeed tuberculous patients with temperatures of 102?"

"But I have a little albumen as well."

"You ought not to know anything about that. You have what I have had occasion to call 'mental albumen.' We have all of us had, when we have not been very well, little albuminous phases which our doctor has done his best to make permanent by calling our attention to them. For one disorder that doctors cure with drugs (as I am told that they do occasionally succeed in doing) they produce a dozen others in healthy subjects by inoculating them with that pathogenic agent a thousand times more virulent than all the microbes in the world, the idea that one is ill. A belief of that sort, which has a disturbing effect on any temperament, acts with special force on neurotic people. Tell them that a shut window is open behind their back, they will begin to sneeze; make them believe that you have put magnesia in their soup, they will be seized with colic; that their coffee is stronger than usual, they will not sleep a wink all night. Do you imagine, Madame, that I needed to do any more than look into your eyes, listen to the way in which you express yourself, look, if I may say so, at this lady, your daughter, and at your grandson, who takes so much after you, to learn what was the matter with you?" "Your grandmother might perhaps go and sit, if the Doctor allows it, in some quiet path in the Champs-Elysées, near that laurel shrubbery where you used to play when you were little," said my mother to me, thus indirectly consulting Dr. du Boulbon, her voice for that reason assuming a tone of timid deference which it would not have had if she had been addressing me alone. The Doctor turned to my grandmother and, being apparently as well-read in literature as in science, adjured her as follows: "Go to the Champs-Elysées, Madame, to the laurel shrubbery which your grandson loves. The laurel you will find health-giving. It purifies. After he had exterminated the serpent Python, it was with a bough of laurel in his hand that Apollo made his entry into Delphi. He sought thus to guard himself from the deadly germs of the venomous monster. So you see that the laurel is the most ancient, the most venerable and, I will add—what is of therapeutic as well as of prophylactic value—the most beautiful of antiseptics."

Inasmuch as a great part of what doctors know is taught them by the sick, they are easily led to believe that this knowledge which patients exhibit is common to them all, and they pride themselves on taking the patient of the moment by surprise with some remark picked up at a previous bedside. Thus it was with the superior smile of a Parisian who, in conversation with a peasant, might hope to surprise him by using suddenly a word of the local dialect that Dr. du Boulbon said to my grandmother: "Probably a windy night will make you sleep when the strongest soporifics would have no effect." "On the contrary, Sir, when the wind blows I can never sleep at all." But doctors are touchy people. "Ach!" muttered du Boulbon, knitting his brows, as if some one had trodden on his toe, or as if my grandmother's sleeplessness on stormy nights were a personal insult to himself. He had not, however, an undue opinion of himself, and since, in his character as a 'superior' person, he felt himself bound not to put any faith in medicine, he quickly recovered his philosophic serenity.

My mother, in her passionate longing for reassurance from Bergotte's friend, added in support of his verdict that a first cousin of my grandmother, who suffered from a nervous complaint, had lain for seven years cloistered in her bedroom at Combray, without leaving her bed more than once or twice a week.

"You see, Madame, I didn't know that, and yet I could have told you."

"But, Sir, I am not in the least like her; on the contrary, my doctor complains that he cannot get me to stay in bed," said my grandmother, whether because she was a little annoyed by the doctor's theories, or was anxious to submit to him any objections that might be raised to them, in the hope that he would refute these and that, after he had gone, she would no longer find any doubt lurking in her own mind as to the accuracy of his encouraging diagnosis.

"Why, naturally, Madame, you cannot have all the forms of—if you'll excuse my saying so—mania at once; you have others, but not that particular one. Yesterday I visited a home for neurasthenics. In the garden, I saw a man standing on a seat, motionless as a fakir, his neck bent in a position which must have been highly uncomfortable. On my asking him what he was doing there, he replied, without turning his head, or moving a muscle: 'You see, Doctor, I am extremely rheumatic and catch cold very easily; I have just been taking a lot of exercise, and while I was getting hot, like a fool, my neck was touching my flannels. If I move it away from my flannels now before letting myself cool down, I am certain to get a stiff neck, and possibly bronchitis.' Which he would, in fact, have done. 'You're a fine specimen of neurasthenia, that's what you are,' I told him. And do you know what argument he advanced to prove that I was mistaken? It was this; that while all the other patients in the place had a mania for testing their weight, so much so that the weighing machine had to be padlocked so that they should not spend the whole day on it, he had to be lifted on to it bodily, so little did he care to be weighed. He prided himself on not sharing the mania of the others without thinking that he had also one of his own, and that it was this which saved him from the other. You must not be offended by the comparison, Madame, for the man who dared not turn his neck for fear of catching a chill is the greatest poet of our day. That poor maniac is the most lofty intellect that I know. Submit to being called a neurotic. You belong to that splendid and pitiable family which is the salt of the earth. All the greatest things we know have come to us from neurotics. It is they and they only who have founded religions and created great works of art. Never will the world be conscious of how much it owes to them, nor above all of what they have suffered in order to bestow their gifts on it. We enjoy fine music, beautiful pictures, a thousand exquisite things, but we do not know what they cost those who wrought them in sleeplessness, tears, spasmodic laughter, rashes, asthma, epilepsy, a terror of death which is worse than any of these, and which you perhaps have felt, Madame," he added with a smile at my grandmother, "for confess now, when I came into the room, you were not feeling very confident. You thought that you were ill; dangerously ill, perhaps. Heaven only knows what the disease was of which you thought you had detected the symptoms. And you were not mistaken; they were there. Neurosis has an absolute genius for malingering. There is no illness which it cannot counterfeit perfectly. It will produce life-like imitations of the dilatations of dyspepsia, the sicknesses of pregnancy, the broken rhythm of the cardiac, the feverishness of the consumptive. If it is capable of deceiving the doctor, how should it fail to deceive the patient? No, no; you mustn't think I'm making fun of your sufferings. I should not undertake to heal them unless I understood them thoroughly. And, well, they say there's no good confession unless it's mutual. I have told you that without nervous trouble there can be no great artist. What is more," he added, raising a solemn forefinger, "there can be no great scientist either. I will go further, and say that, unless he himself is subject to nervous trouble, he is not, I won't say a good doctor, but I do say the right doctor to treat nervous troubles. In nervous pathology a doctor who doesn't say too many foolish things is a patient half-cured, just as a critic is a poet who has stopped writing verse and a policeman a burglar who has retired from practice. I, Madame, I do not, like you, fancy myself to be suffering from albuminuria, I have not your nervous fear of food, nor of fresh air, but I can never go to sleep without getting out of bed at least twenty times to see if my door is shut. And in that home where I found the poet yesterday who would not move his neck, I had gone to secure a room, for—this is between ourselves—I spend my holidays there looking after myself when I have increased my own trouble by wearing myself out in the attempt to cure other people."

"But do you want me to take a cure like that, Sir?" came in a frightened voice from my grandmother.

"It is not necessary, Madame. The symptoms which you describe will vanish at my bidding. Besides, you have with you a very efficient person whom I appoint as your doctor from now onwards. That is your trouble itself, the super-activity of your nerves. Even if I knew how to cure you of that, I should take good care not to. All I need do is to control it. I see on your table there one of Bergotte's books. Cured of your neurosis you would no longer care for it. Well, I might feel it my duty to substitute for the joys that it procures for you a nervous stability which would be quite incapable of giving you those joys: But those joys themselves are a strong remedy, the strongest of all perhaps. No; I have nothing to say against your nervous energy. All I ask is that it should listen to me; I leave you in its charge. It must reverse its engines. The force which it is now using to prevent you from getting up, from taking sufficient food, let it employ in making you eat, in making you read, in making you go out, and in distracting you in every possible way. You needn't tell me that you are fatigued. Fatigue is the organic realisation of a preconceived idea. Begin by not thinking it. And if ever you have a slight indisposition, which is a thing that may happen to anyone, it will be just as if you hadn't it, for your nervous energy will have endowed you with what M. de Talleyrand, in an expression full of meaning, called 'imaginary health.' See, it has begun to cure you already, you have been sitting up in bed listening to me without once leaning back on your pillows; your eye is bright, your complexion is good, I have been talking to you for half an hour by the clock and you have never noticed the time. Well, Madame, I shall now bid you good-day."

When, after seeing Dr. du Boulbon to the door, I returned to the room in which my mother was by herself, the oppression that had been weighing on me for the last few weeks lifted, I felt that my mother was going to break out with a cry of joy and would see my joy, I felt that inability to endure the suspense of the coming moment at which a person is going to be overcome with emotion in our presence, which in another category is a little like the thrill of fear that goes through one when one knows that somebody is going to come in and startle one by a door that is still closed; I tried to speak to Mamma but my voice broke, and, bursting into tears, I stayed for a long time, my head on her shoulder, crying, tasting, accepting, relishing my grief, now that I knew that it had departed from my life, as we like to exalt ourselves by forming virtuous plans which circumstances do not permit us to put into execution. Françoise annoyed me by her refusal to share in our joy. She was quite overcome because there had just been a terrible scene between the lovesick footman and the tale-bearing porter. It had required the Duchess herself, in her unfailing benevolence, to intervene, restore an apparent calm to the household and forgive the footman. For she was a good mistress, and that would have been the ideal 'place' if only she didn't listen to 'stories.'

During the last few days people had begun to hear of my grandmother's illness and to inquire for news of her. Saint-Loup had written to me: "I do not wish to take advantage of a time when your dear grandmother is unwell to convey to you what is far more than mere reproaches, on a matter with which she has no concern. But I should not be speaking the truth were I to say to you, even out of politeness, that I shall ever forget the perfidy of your conduct, or that there can ever be any forgiveness for so scoundrelly a betrayal." But some other friends, supposing that my grandmother was not seriously ill (they may not even have known that she was ill at all), had asked me to meet them next day in the Champs-Elysées, to go with them from there to pay a call together, ending up with a dinner in the country, the thought of which appealed to me. I had no longer any reason to forego these two pleasures. When my grandmother had been told that it was now imperative, if she was to obey Dr. du Boulbon's orders, that she should go out as much as possible, she had herself at once suggested the Champs-Elysées. It would be easy for me to escort her there; and, while she sat reading, to arrange with my friends where I should meet them later; and I should still be in time, if I made haste, to take the train with them to Ville d'Avray. When the time came, my grandmother did not want to go out; she felt tired. But my mother, acting on du Boulbon's instructions, had the strength of mind to be firm and to insist on obedience. She was almost in tears at the thought that my grandmother was going to relapse again into her nervous weakness, which she might never be able to shake off. Never again would there be such a fine, warm day for an outing. The sun as it moved through the sky interspersed here and there in the broken solidity of the balcony its unsubstantial muslins, and gave to the freestone ledge a warm epidermis, an indefinite halo of gold. As Françoise had not had time to send a 'tube' to her daughter, she left us immediately after luncheon. She very kindly consented, however, to call first at Jupien's, to get a stitch put in the cloak which my grandmother was going to wear. Returning at that moment from my morning walk I accompanied her into the shop. "Is it your young master who brings you here," Jupien asked Françoise, "is it you who are bringing him to see me, or is it some good wind and fortune that bring you both?" For all his want of education, Jupien respected the laws of grammar as instinctively as M. de Guermantes, in spite of every effort, broke them. With Françoise gone and the cloak mended, it was time for my grandmother to get ready. Having obstinately refused to let Mamma stay in the room with her, she took, left to herself, an endless time over her dressing, and now that I knew her to be quite well, with that strange indifference which we feel towards our relatives so long as they are alive, which makes us put everyone else before them, I felt it to be very selfish of her to take so long, to risk making me late when she knew that I had an appointment with my friends and was dining at Ville d'Avray. In my impatience I finally went downstairs without waiting for her, after I had twice been told that she was just ready. At last she joined me, without apologising to me, as she generally did, for having kept me waiting, flushed and bothered like a person who has come to a place in a hurry and has forgotten half her belongings, just as I was reaching the half-opened glass door which, without warming them with it in the least, let in the liquid, throbbing, tepid air from the street (as though the sluices of a reservoir had been opened) between the frigid walls of the passage.

"Oh, dear, if you're going to meet your friends I ought to have put on another cloak. I look rather poverty-stricken in this one."

I was startled to see her so flushed, and supposed that having begun by making herself late she had had to hurry over her dressing. When we left the cab at the end of the Avenue Gabriel, in the Champs-Elysées, I saw my grandmother, without a word to me, turn aside and make her way to the little old pavilion with its green trellis, at the door of which I had once waited for Françoise. The same park-keeper who had been standing there then was still talking to Françoise's 'Marquise' when, following my grandmother who, doubtless because she was feeling sick, had her hand in front of her mouth, I climbed the steps of that little rustic theatre, erected there among the gardens. At the entrance, as in those circus booths where the clown, dressed for the ring and smothered in flour, stands at the door and takes the money himself for the seats, the 'Marquise,' at the receipt of custom, was still there in her place with her huge, uneven face smeared with a coarse plaster and her little bonnet of red flowers and black lace surmounting her auburn wig. But I do not suppose that she recognised me. The park-keeper, abandoning his watch over the greenery, with the colour of which his uniform had been designed to harmonise, was talking to her, on a chair by her side.

"So you're still here?" he was saying. "You don't think of retiring?"

"And what have I to retire for, Sir? Will you kindly tell me where I shall be better off than here, where I should live more at my ease, and with every comfort? And then there's all the coming and going, plenty of distraction; my little Paris, I call it; my customers keep me in touch with everything that's going on. Just to give you an example, there's one of them who went out not more than five minutes ago; he's a magistrate, in the very highest position there is. Very well, Sir," she cried with ardour, as though prepared to maintain the truth of this assertion by violence, should the agent of civic authority shew any sign of challenging its accuracy, "for the last eight years, do you follow me, every day God has made, regularly on the stroke of three he's been here, always polite, never saying one word louder than another, never making any mess; and he stays half an hour and more to read his papers and do his little jobs. There was one day he didn't come. I never noticed it at the time, but that evening, all of a sudden I said to myself: 'Why, that gentleman never came to-day; perhaps he's dead!' And that gave me a regular turn, you know, because, of course, I get quite fond of people when they behave nicely. And so I was very glad when I saw him come in again next day, and I said to him, I did: 'I hope there was nothing wrong yesterday, Sir?' Then he told me that it was his wife that had died, and he'd been so put out, poor gentleman, what with one thing and another, he hadn't been able to come. He had that really sad look, you know, people have when they've been married five-and-twenty years, and then the parting, but he seemed pleased, all the same, to be back here. You could see that all his little habits had been quite upset. I did what I could to make him feel at home. I said to him: 'Y' mustn't let go of things, Sir. Just come here the same as before, it will be a little distraction for you in your sorrow.' "

The 'Marquise' resumed a gentler tone, for she had observed that the guardian of groves and lawns was listening to her complacently and with no thought of contradiction, keeping harmlessly in its scabbard a sword which looked more like a horticultural implement or some symbol of a garden-god.

"And besides," she went on, "I choose my customers, I don't let everyone into my little parlours, as I call them. And doesn't the place just look like a parlour with all my flowers? Such friendly customers I have; there's always some one or other brings me a spray of nice lilac, or jessamine or roses; my favourite flowers, roses are."

The thought that we were perhaps despised by this lady because we never brought any sprays of lilac or fine roses to her bower made me redden, and in the hope of making a bodily escape—or of being condemned only by default—from an adverse judgment, I moved towards the exit. But it is not always in this world the people who bring us fine roses to whom we are most friendly, for the 'Marquise,' thinking that I was bored, turned to me.

"You wouldn't like me to open a little place for you?"

And, on my declining:

"No? You're sure you won't?" she persisted, smiling. "Well, just as you please. You're welcome to it, but I know quite well, not having to pay for a thing won't make you want to do it if you don't want to."

At this moment a shabbily dressed woman hurried into the place who seemed to be feeling precisely the want in question. But she did not belong to the 'Marquise's' world, for the latter, with the ferocity of a snob, flung at her:

"I've nothing disengaged, Ma'am."

"Will they be long?" asked the poor lady, reddening beneath the yellow flowers in her hat.

"Well, Ma'am, if you'll take my advice, you'll try somewhere else; you see, there are still these two gentlemen waiting, and I've only one closet; the others are out of order."

"Not much money there," she explained when the other had gone. "It's not the sort we want here, either; they're not clean, don't treat the place with respect, it would be your humble here that would have to spend the next hour cleaning up after her ladyship. I'm not sorry to lose her penny."

Finally my grandmother emerged, and feeling that she probably would not seek to atone by a lavish gratuity for the indiscretion that she had shewn by remaining so long inside, I beat a retreat, so as not to have to share in the scorn which the 'Marquise' would no doubt heap on her, and began strolling along a path, but slowly, so that my grandmother should not have to hurry to overtake me; as presently she did. I expected her to begin: "I am afraid I've kept you waiting; I hope you'll still be in time for your friends," but she did not utter a single word, so much so that, feeling a little hurt, I was disinclined to speak first; until looking up at her I noticed that as she walked beside me she kept her face turned the other way. I was afraid that her heart might be troubling her again. I studied her more carefully and was struck by the disjointedness of her gait. Her hat was crooked, her cloak stained; she had the confused and worried look, the flushed, slightly dazed face of a person who has just been knocked down by a carriage or pulled out of a ditch.

"I was afraid you were feeling sick, Grandmamma; are you feeling better now?" I asked her.

Probably she thought that it would be impossible for her, without alarming me, not to make some answer.

"I heard the whole of her conversation with the keeper," she told me. "Could anything have been more typical of the Guermantes, or the Verdurins and their little circle? Heavens, what fine language she put it all in!" And she quoted, with deliberate application, this sentence from her own special Marquise, Mme. de Sévigné: "As I listened to them I thought that they were preparing for me the pleasures of a farewell."

Such was the speech that she made me, a speech into which she had put all her critical delicacy, her love of quotations, her memory of the classics, more thoroughly even than she would naturally have done, and as though to prove that she retained possession of all these faculties. But I guessed rather than heard what she said, so inaudible was the voice in which she muttered her sentences, clenching her teeth more than could be accounted for by the fear of being sick again.

"Come!" I said lightly, so as not to seem to be taking her illness too seriously, "since your heart is bothering you, shall we go home now? I don't want to trundle a grandmother with indigestion about the Champs-Elysées."

"I didn't like to suggest it, because of your friends," she replied. "Poor boy! But if you don't mind, I think it would be wiser."

I was afraid of her noticing the strange way in which she uttered these words.

"Come!" I said to her sharply, "you mustn't tire yourself talking; if your heart is bad, it's silly; wait till we get home."

She smiled at me sorrowfully and gripped my hand. She had realised that there was no need to hide from me what I had at once guessed, that she had had a slight stroke.

PART II

CHAPTER ONE

MY GRANDMOTHER'S ILLNESS

(Continued)

We made our way back along the Avenue Gabriel, through the strolling crowd. I left my grandmother to rest on a seat and went in search of a cab. She, in whose heart I always placed myself when I had to form an opinion of the most unimportant person, she was now closed to me, had become part of the world outside, and, more than from any casual passer-by, I was obliged to keep from her what I thought of her condition, to say no word of my uneasiness. I could not have spoken of it to her in greater confidence than to a stranger. She had suddenly handed back to me the thoughts, the griefs which, from the days of my infancy, I had entrusted for all time to her keeping. She was not yet dead. I was already alone. And even those allusions which she had made to the Guermantes, to Mme. de Sévigné, to our conversations about the little clan, assumed an air of being without point or occasion, fantastic, because they sprang from the nullity of this very being who to-morrow possibly would have ceased to exist, for whom they would no longer have any meaning, from that nullity, incapable of conceiving them, which my grandmother would shortly be.

"Well, Sir, I don't like to say no, but you have not made an appointment, you have no time fixed. Besides, this is not my day for seeing patients. You surely have a doctor of your own. I cannot interfere with his practice, unless he were to call me in for a consultation. It's a question of professional etiquette . . ."

Just as I was signalling to a cabman, I had caught sight of the famous Professor E——, almost a friend of my father and grandfather, acquainted at any rate with them both, who lived in the Avenue Gabriel, and, with a sudden inspiration, had stopped him just as he was entering his house, thinking that he would perhaps be the very person to advise my grandmother. But he was evidently in a hurry and, after calling for his letters, seemed anxious to get rid of me, so that my only chance of speaking to him lay in going up with him in the lift, of which he begged me to allow him to work the switches himself, this being a mania with him.

"But, Sir, I am not asking you to see my grandmother here; you will realise from what I am trying to tell you that she is not in a fit state to come; what I am asking is that you should call at our house in half an hour's time, when I have taken her home."

"Call at your house! Really, Sir, you must not expect me to do that. I am dining with the Minister of Commerce. I have a call to pay first. I must change at once, and to make matters worse I have torn my coat and my other one has no buttonholes for my decorations. I beg you, please, to oblige me by not touching the switches. You don't know how the lift works; one can't be too careful. Getting that buttonhole made means more delay. Well, as I am a friend of your people, if your grandmother comes here at once I will see her. But I warn you that I shall be able to give her exactly a quarter of an hour, nor a moment more."

I had started off at once, without even getting out of the lift which Professor E—— had himself set in motion to take me down again, casting a suspicious glance at me as he did so.

We may, indeed, say that the hour of death is uncertain, but when we say so we represent that hour to ourselves as situated in a vague and remote expanse of time, it never occurs to us that it can have any connexion with the day that has already dawned, or may signify that death—or its first assault and partial possession of us, after which it will never leave hold of us again—may occur this very afternoon, so far from uncertain, this afternoon every hour of which has already been allotted to some occupation. You make a point of taking your drive every day so that in a month's time you will have had the full benefit of the fresh air; you have hesitated over which cloak you will take, which cabman to call, you are in the cab, the whole day lies before you, short because you have to be at home early, as a friend is coming to see you; you hope that it will be as fine again to-morrow; and you have no suspicion that death, which has been making its way towards you along another plane, shrouded in an impenetrable darkness, has chosen precisely this day of all days to make its appearance, in a few minutes' time, more or less, at the moment when the carriage has reached the Champs-Elysées. Perhaps those who are haunted as a rule by the fear of the utter strangeness of death will find something reassuring in this kind of death—in this kind of first contact with death—because death thus assumes a known, familiar guise of everyday life. A good luncheon has preceded it, and the same outing that people take who are in perfect health. A drive home in an open carriage comes on top of its first onslaught; ill as my grandmother was, there were, after all, several people who could testify that at six o'clock, as we came home from the Champs-Elysées, they had bowed to her as she drove past in an open carriage, in perfect weather. Legrandin, making his way towards the Place de la Concorde, raised his hat to us, stopping to look after us with an air of surprise. I, who was not yet detached from life, asked my grandmother if she had acknowledged his greeting, reminding her of his readiness to take offence. My grandmother, thinking me no doubt very frivolous, raised her hand in the air as though to say: "What does it matter? It is not of the least importance."

Yes, one might have said that, a few minutes earlier, when I was looking for a cab, my grandmother was resting on a seat in the Avenue Gabriel, and that a little later she had driven past in an open carriage. But would that have been really true? The seat, for instance, to maintain its position at the side of an avenue—for all that it may be subjected also to certain conditions of equilibrium—has no need of energy. But in order that a living person may be stable, even when supported by a seat or in a carriage, there is required a tension of forces which we do not ordinarily perceive, any more than we perceive (because its action is universal) atmospheric pressure. Possibly if we were to be hollowed out and then left to support the pressure of the air we might feel, in the moment that preceded our extinction, that terrible weight which there was nothing left in us to neutralise. Similarly when the abyss of sickness and death opens within us, and we have no longer any resistance to offer to the tumult with which the world and our own body rush upon us, then to endure even the tension of our own muscles, the shudder that freezes us to the marrow, then even to keep ourselves motionless in what we ordinarily regard as nothing but the simple negative position of a lifeless thing requires, if we wish our head to remain erect and our eyes calm, an expense of vital energy and becomes the object of an exhausting struggle.

And if Legrandin had looked back at us with that astonished air, it was because to him, as to the other people who passed us then, in the cab in which my grandmother was apparently seated she had seemed to be foundering, sliding into the abyss, clinging desperately to the cushions which could barely arrest the downward plunge of her body, her hair in disorder, her eye wild, unable any longer to face the assault of the images which its pupil was not strong enough now to bear. She had appeared to them, although I was still by her side, submerged in that unknown world somewhere in which she had already received the blows, traces of which she still bore when I looked up at her a few minutes earlier in the Champs-Elysées, her hat, her face, her cloak left in disorder by the hand of the invisible angel with whom she had wrestled. I have thought, since, that this moment of her stroke cannot have altogether surprised my grandmother, that indeed she had perhaps foreseen it a long time back, had lived in expectation of it. She had not known, naturally, when this fatal moment would come, had never been certain, any more than those lovers whom a similar doubt leads alternately to found unreasonable hopes and unjustified suspicions on the fidelity of their mistresses. But it is rarely that these grave maladies, like that which now at last had struck her full in the face, do not take up their abode in the sick man for a long time before killing him, during which time they make haste, like a 'sociable' neighbour or tenant, to introduce themselves to him. A terrible acquaintance, not so much from the sufferings that it causes as from the strange novelty of the definite restriction which it imposes upon life. A woman sees herself dying, in these cases not at the actual moment of death but months, sometimes years before, when death has hideously come to dwell in her. The sufferer makes the acquaintance of the stranger whom she hears coming and going in her brain. She does not know him by sight, it is true, but from the sounds which she hears him regularly make she can form an idea of his habits. Is he a criminal? One morning, she can no longer hear him. He has gone. Ah! If it were only for ever! In the evening he has returned. What are his plans? Her specialist, put to the question, like an adored mistress, replies with avowals that one day are believed, another day fail to convince her. Or rather it is not the mistress's part but that of the servants one interrogates that the doctor plays. They are only third parties. The person whom we press for an answer, whom we suspect of being about to play us false, is life itself, and although we feel her to be no longer the same we believe in her still or at least remain undecided until the day on which she finally abandons us.

I helped my grandmother into Professor E——'s lift and a moment later he came to us and took us into his consulting room. But there, busy as he was, his bombastic manner changed, such is the force of habit; for his habit was to be friendly, that is to say lively with his patients. Since he knew that my grandmother was a great reader, and was himself one also, he devoted the first few minutes to quoting various favourite passages of poetry appropriate to the glorious summer weather. He had placed her in an armchair and himself with his back to the light so as to have a good view of her. His examination was minute and thorough, even obliging me at one moment to leave the room. He continued it after my return, then, having finished, went on, although the quarter of an hour was almost at an end, repeating various quotations to my grandmother. He even made a few jokes, which were witty enough, though I should have preferred to hear them on some other occasion, but which completely reassured me by the tone of amusement in which he uttered them. I then remembered that M. Fallières, the President of the Senate, had, many years earlier, had a false seizure, and that to the consternation of his political rivals he had returned a few days later to his duties and had begun, it was said, his preparations for a more or less remote succession to the Presidency of the Republic. My confidence in my grandmother's prompt recovery was all the more complete in that, just as I was recalling the example of M. Fallières, I was distracted from following up the similarity by a shout of laughter, which served as conclusion to one of the Professor's jokes. After which he took out his watch, wrinkled his brows petulantly on seeing that he was five minutes late, and while he bade us good-bye rang for his other coat to be brought to him at once. I waited until my grandmother had left the room, closed the door and asked him to tell me the truth.

"There is not the slightest hope," he informed me. "It is a stroke brought on by uraemia. In itself, uraemia is not necessarily fatal, but this case seems to me desperate. I need not tell you that I hope I am mistaken. Anyhow, you have Cottard, you're in excellent hands. Excuse me," he broke off as a maid came into the room with his coat over her arm. "I told you, I'm dining with the Minister of Commerce, and I have a call to pay first. Ah! Life is not all a bed of roses, as one is apt to think at your age."

And he graciously offered me his hand. I had shut the door behind me, and a footman was shewing us into the hall when we heard a loud shout of rage. The maid had forgotten to cut and hem the buttonhole for the decorations. This would take another ten minutes. The Professor continued to storm while I stood on the landing gazing at a grandmother for whom there was not the slightest hope. Each of us is indeed alone. We started for home.

The sun was sinking, it burnished an interminable wall along which our cab had to pass before reaching the street in which we lived, a wall against which the shadow cast by the setting sun of horse and carriage stood out in black on a ruddy background, like a funeral car on some Pompeian terracotta. At length we arrived at the house. I made the invalid sit at the foot of the staircase in the hall, and went up to warn my mother. I told her that my grandmother had come home feeling slightly unwell, after an attack of giddiness. As soon as I began to speak, my mother's face was convulsed by the paroxysm of a despair which was yet already so resigned that I realised that for many years she had been holding herself quietly in readiness for an uncalendared but final day. She asked me no question; it seemed that, just as malevolence likes to exaggerate the sufferings of other people, so in her devotion she would not admit that her mother was seriously ill, especially with a disease which might affect the brain. Mamma shuddered, her eyes wept without tears, she ran to give orders for the doctor to be fetched at once; but when Françoise asked who was ill she could not reply, her voice stuck in her throat. She came running downstairs with me, struggling to banish from her face the sob that contracted it. My grandmother was waiting below on the sofa in the hall, but, as soon as she heard us coming, drew herself together, stood up, and waved her hand cheerfully at Mamma. I had partially wrapped her head in a white lace shawl, telling her that it was so that she should not catch cold on the stairs. I had hoped that my mother would not notice the change in her face, the distortion of her mouth; my precaution proved unnecessary; my mother went up to my grandmother, kissed her hand as though it were that of her God, raised her up, carried her to the lift with infinite precautions in which there was, with the fear of hurting her by any clumsy movement, the humility of one who felt herself unworthy to touch the most precious thing, to her, in the world, but never once did she raise her eyes, nor look at the sufferer's face. Perhaps this was in order that my grandmother might not be saddened by the thought that the sight of her could alarm her daughter. Perhaps from fear of a grief so piercing that she dared not face it. Perhaps from reverence, because she did not feel it permissible to herself, without impiety, to remark the trace of any mental weakening on those venerated features. Perhaps to be better able to preserve intact in her memory the image of the true face of my grandmother, radiant with wisdom and goodness. So they went up side by side, my grandmother half hidden by her shawl, my mother turning away her eyes.

Meanwhile there was one person who never took hers from what could be made out of my grandmother's altered features, at which her daughter dared not look, a person who fastened on them a gaze wondering, indiscreet and of evil omen: this was Françoise. Not that she was not sincerely attached to my grandmother (indeed she had been disappointed and almost scandalised by the coldness shewn by Mamma, whom she would have liked to see fling herself weeping into her mother's arms), but she had a certain tendency always to look at the worse side of things, she had retained from her childhood two peculiarities which would seem to be mutually exclusive, but which when combined strengthened one another: the want of restraint common among people of humble origin who make no attempt to conceal the impression, in other words the painful alarm, aroused in them by the sight of a physical change which it would be in better taste to appear not to notice, and the unfeeling coarseness of the peasant who begins by tearing the wings off dragon-flies until she is allowed to wring the necks of chickens, and lacks that modesty which would make her conceal the interest that she feels in the sight of suffering flesh.

When, thanks to the faultless ministrations of Françoise, my grandmother had been put to bed, she discovered that she could speak much more easily, the little rupture or obstruction of a blood-vessel which had produced the uraemia having apparently been quite slight. And at once she was anxious not to fail Mamma in her hour of need, to assist her in the most cruel moments through which she had yet had to pass.

"Well, my child," she began, taking my mother's hand in one of her own, and keeping the other in front of her lips, so as to account for the slight difficulty which she still found in uttering certain words. "So this is all the pity you shew your mother! You look as if you thought that indigestion was quite a pleasant thing!"

Then for the first time my mother's eyes gazed passionately into those of my grandmother, not wishing to see the rest of her face, and she replied, beginning the list of those false promises which we swear but are unable to fulfil:

"Mamma, you will soon be quite well again, your daughter will see to that."

And embodying all her dearest love, all her determination that her mother should recover, in a kiss to which she entrusted them, and which she followed with her mind, with her whole being until it flowered upon her lips, she bent down to lay it humbly, reverently upon the precious brow. My grandmother complained of a sort of alluvial deposit of bedclothes which kept gathering all the time in the same place, over her left leg, and from which she could never manage to free herself. But she did not realise that she was herself the cause of this (so that day after day she accused Françoise unjustly of not 'doing' her bed properly). By a convulsive movement she kept flinging to that side the whole flood of those billowing blankets of fine wool, which gathered there like the sand in a bay which is very soon transformed into a beach (unless the inhabitants construct a breakwater) by the successive deposits of the tide.

My mother and I (whose falsehood was exposed before we spoke by the obnoxious perspicacity of Françoise) would not even admit that my grandmother was seriously ill, as though such an admission might give pleasure to her enemies (not that she had any) and it was more loving to feel that she was not so bad as all that, in short from the same instinctive sentiment which had led me to suppose that Andrée was too sorry for Albertine to be really fond of her. The same individual phenomena are reproduced in the mass, in great crises. In a war, the man who does not love his country says nothing against it, but regards it as lost, commiserates it, sees everything in the darkest colours.

Françoise was of infinite value to us owing to her faculty of doing without sleep, of performing the most arduous tasks. And if, when she had gone to bed after several nights spent in the sick-room, we were obliged to call her a quarter of an hour after she had fallen asleep, she was so happy to be able to do the most tiring duties as if they had been the simplest things in the world that, so far from looking cross, her face would light up with a satisfaction tinged with modesty. Only when the time came for mass, or for breakfast, then, had my grandmother been in her death agony, still Françoise would have quietly slipped away so as not to make herself late. She neither could nor would let her place be taken by her young footman. It was true that she had brought from Combray an extremely exalted idea of everyone's duty towards ourselves; she would not have tolerated that any of our servants should 'fail' us. This doctrine had made her so noble, so imperious, so efficient an instructor that there had never come to our house any servants, however corrupted, who had not speedily modified, purified their conception of life so far as to refuse to touch the usual commissions from tradesmen and to come rushing—however little they might previously have sought to oblige—to take from my hands and not let me tire myself by carrying the smallest package. But at Combray Françoise had contracted also—and had brought with her to Paris—the habit of not being able to put up with any assistance in her work. The sight of anyone coming to help her seemed to her like receiving a deadly insult, and servants had remained for weeks in the house without receiving from her any response to their morning greeting, had even gone off on their holidays without her bidding them good-bye or their guessing her reason, which was simply and solely that they had offered to do a share of her work on some day when she had not been well. And at this moment when my grandmother was so ill Françoise's duties seemed to her peculiarly her own. She would not allow herself, she, the official incumbent, to be done out of her part in the ritual of these festal days. And so her young footman, sent packing by her, did not know what to do with himself, and not content with having copied the butler's example and supplied himself with note-paper from my desk had begun as well to borrow volumes of poetry from my bookshelves. He sat reading them for a good half of the day, out of admiration for the poets who had written them, but also so as, during the rest of his time, to begem with quotations the letters which he wrote to his friends in his native village. Naturally he expected these to dazzle them. But as there was little sequence in his ideas he had formed the notion that these poems, picked out at random from my shelves, were matters of common knowledge, to which it was customary to refer. So much so that in writing to these peasants, whose stupefaction he discounted, he interspersed his own reflexions with lines from Lamartine, just as he might have said "Who laughs last, laughs longest!" or merely "How are you keeping?"

To ease her pain my grandmother was given morphine. Unfortunately, if this relieved her in other ways, it increased the quantity of albumen. The blows which we aimed at the wicked ogre who had taken up his abode in my grandmother were always wide of the mark, and it was she, her poor interposed body that had to bear them, without her ever uttering more than a faint groan by way of complaint. And the pain that we caused her found no compensation in a benefit which we were unable to give her. The savage ogre whom we were anxious to exterminate we barely succeeded in touching, and all we did was to enrage him still further, and possibly hasten the moment at which he would devour his luckless captive. On certain days when the discharge of albumen had been excessive Cottard, after some hesitation, stopped the morphine. In this man, so insignificant, so common, there was, in these brief moments in which he deliberated, in which the relative dangers of one and another course of treatment presented themselves alternately to his mind until he arrived at a decision, the same sort of greatness as in a general who, vulgar in all the rest of his life, is a great strategist, and in an hour of peril, after a moment's reflexion, decides upon what is from the military point of view the wisest course, and gives the order: "Advance eastwards." Medically, however little hope there might be of setting any limit to this attack of uraemia, it did not do to tire the kidneys. But, on the other hand, when my grandmother did not have morphine, her pain became unbearable; she perpetually attempted a certain movement which it was difficult for her to perform without groaning. To a great extent, suffering is a sort of need felt by the organism to make itself familiar with a new state, which makes it uneasy, to adapt its sensibility to that state. We can discern this origin of pain in the case of certain inconveniences which are not such for everyone. Into a room filled with a pungent smoke two men of a coarse fibre will come and attend to their business; a third, more highly strung, will betray an incessant discomfort. His nostrils will continue to sniff anxiously the odour he ought, one would say, to try not to notice but will keep on attempting to attach, by a more exact apprehension of it, to his troubled sense of smell. One consequence of which may well be that his intense preoccupation will prevent him from complaining of a toothache. When my grandmother was in pain the sweat trickled over the pink expanse of her brow, glueing to it her white locks, and if she thought that none of us was in the room she would cry out: "Oh, it's dreadful!" but if she caught sight of my mother, at once she employed all her energy in banishing from her face every sign of pain, or—an alternative stratagem—repeated the same plaints, accompanying them with explanations which gave a different sense, retrospectively, to those which my mother might have overheard.

"Oh! My dear, it's dreadful to have to stay in bed on a beautiful sunny day like this when one wants to be out in the air; I am crying with rage at your orders."

But she could not get rid of the look of anguish in her eyes, the sweat on her brow, the convulsive start, checked at once, of her limbs.

"There is nothing wrong. I'm complaining because I'm not lying very comfortably. I feel my hair is untidy, my heart is bad, I knocked myself against the wall."

And my mother, at the foot of the bed, riveted to that suffering form, as though, by dint of piercing with her gaze that pain-bedewed brow, that body which hid the evil thing within it, she could have succeeded in reaching that evil thing and carrying it away, my mother said:

"No, no, Mamma dear, we won't let you suffer like that, we will find something to take it away, have patience just for a moment; let me give you a kiss, darling—no, you're not to move."

And stooping over the bed, with bended knees, almost kneeling on the ground, as though by an exercise of humility she would have a better chance of making acceptable the impassioned gift of herself, she lowered towards my grandmother her whole life contained in her face as in a ciborium which she extended over her, adorned in relief with dimples and folds so passionate, so sorrowful, so sweet that one knew not whether they had been carved by the chisel of a kiss, a sob or a smile. My grandmother, also, tried to lift up her face to Mamma's. It was so altered that probably, had she been strong enough to go out, she would have been recognised only by the feather in her hat. Her features, like the clay in a sculptor's hands, seemed to be straining, with an effort which distracted her from everything else, to conform to some particular model which we failed to identify. This business of modelling was now almost finished, and if my grandmother's face had shrunk in the process it had at the same time hardened. The veins that ran beneath its surface seemed those not of a piece of marble but of some more rugged stone. Constantly thrust forwards by the difficulty that she found in breathing and as constantly forced back on to her pillow by exhaustion, her face, worn, diminished, terribly expressive, seemed like, in a primitive, almost prehistoric carving, the rude, flushed, purplish, desperate face of some savage guardian of a tomb. But the whole task was not yet accomplished. Next, her resistance must be overcome, and that tomb, the entrance to which she had so painfully guarded, with that tense contraction, entered.

In one of those moments in which, as the saying goes, one does not know what saint to invoke, as my grandmother was coughing and sneezing a good deal, we took the advice of a relative who assured us that if we sent for the specialist X—— he would get rid of all that in a couple of days. People say that sort of thing about their own doctors, and their friends believe them just as Françoise always believed the advertisements in the newspapers. The specialist came with his bag packed with all the colds and coughs of his other patients, like Aeolus's bottle. My grandmother refused point-blank to let herself be examined. And we, out of consideration for the doctor, who had had his trouble for nothing, deferred to the desire that he expressed to inspect each of our noses in turn, albeit there was nothing the matter with any of them. According to him, however, there was; everything, whether headache or colic, heart-disease or diabetes, was a disease of the nose that had been wrongly diagnosed. To each of us he said: "I should like to have another look at that little cornea. Don't put it off too long. I can soon get rid of it for you with a hot needle." We were, of course, thinking of something quite different. And yet we asked ourselves: "Get rid of what?" In a word, every one of our noses was diseased; his mistake lay only in his use of the present tense. For by the following day his examination and provisional treatment had taken effect. Each of us had his or her catarrh. And when in the street he ran into my father doubled up with a cough, he smiled to think that an ignorant layman might suppose the attack to be due to his intervention. He had examined us at a moment when we were already ill.

My grandmother's illness gave occasion to various people to manifest an excess or deficiency of sympathy which surprised us quite as much as the sort of chance which led one or another of them to reveal to us connecting links of circumstances, or of friendship for that matter, which we had never suspected. And the signs of interest shewn by the people who called incessantly at the house to inquire revealed to us the gravity of an illness which, until then, we had not sufficiently detached from the countless painful impressions that we received in my grandmother's room. Summoned by telegram, her sisters declined to leave Combray. They had discovered a musician there who gave them excellent chamber concerts, in listening to which they thought that they could find, better than by the invalid's bedside, food for thought, a melancholy exaltation the form of which was, to say the least of it, unusual. Mme. Sazerat wrote to Mamma, but in the tone of a person whom the sudden breaking off of a betrothal (the cause of the rupture being her Dreyfusism) has parted from one for ever. Bergotte, on the other hand, came every day and spent several hours with me.

He had always made a habit of going regularly for some time to the same house, where, accordingly, he need not stand on ceremony. But formerly it had been in order that he might talk without being interrupted; now it was so that he might sit for as long as he chose in silence, without being expected to talk. For he was very ill, some people said with albuminuria, like my grandmother. According to another version, he had a tumour. He grew steadily weaker; it was with difficulty that he came up our staircase, with greater difficulty still that he went down it. Even though he held on to the banisters he often stumbled, and he would, I believe, have stayed at home had he not been afraid of losing altogether the habit of going out, the capacity to go out, he, the 'man with the little beard' whom I had seen so alert, not very long since. He was now quite blind and even his speech was frequently obstructed.

But at the same time, by a directly opposite process, the body of his work, known only to a few literary people at the period when Mme. Swann used to patronise their timid efforts to disseminate it, now grown in stature and strength before the eyes of all, had acquired an extraordinary power of expansion among the general public. The general rule is, no doubt, that only after his death does a writer become famous. But it was while he still lived, and during his slow progress towards a death that he had not yet reached that this writer was able to watch the progress of his works towards Renown. A dead writer can at least be illustrious without any strain on himself. The effulgence of his name is stopped short by the stone upon his grave. In the deafness of the eternal sleep he is not importuned by Glory. But for Bergotte the antithesis was still incomplete. He existed still sufficiently to suffer from the tumult. He was moving still, though with difficulty, while his books, bounding about him, like daughters whom one loves but whose impetuous youthfulness and noisy pleasures tire one, brought day after day, to his very bedside, a crowd of fresh admirers.

The visits which he now began to pay us came for me several years too late, for I had no longer the same admiration for him as of old. Which is not in any sense incompatible with the growth of his reputation. A man's work seldom becomes completely understood and successful before that of another writer, still obscure, has begun in the minds of certain people more difficult to please to substitute a fresh cult for one that has almost ceased to command observance. In the books of Bergotte which I constantly reread, his sentences stood out as clearly before my eyes as my own thoughts, the furniture in my room and the carriages in the street. All the details were quite easily seen, not perhaps precisely as one had always seen them, but at any rate as one was accustomed to see them now. But a new writer had recently begun to publish work in which the relations between things were so different from those that connected them for me that I could understand hardly anything of what he wrote. He would say, for instance: "The hose-pipes admired the smart upkeep of the roads" (and so far it was simple, I followed him smoothly along those roads) "which started every five minutes from Briand and Claudel." At that point I ceased to understand, because I had expected the name of a place and was given that of a person instead. Only I felt that it was not the sentence that was badly constructed but I myself that lacked the strength and ability necessary to reach the end. I would start afresh striving tooth and nail to climb to the pinnacle from which I would see things in their novel relations. And each time, after I had got about halfway through the sentence, I would fall back again, as later on, when I joined the Army, in my attempts at the exercise known as the 'bridge-ladder.' I felt nevertheless for the new writer the admiration which an awkward boy who never receives any marks for gymnastics feels when he watches another more nimble. And from then onwards I felt less admiration for Bergotte, whose limpidity began to strike me as insufficient. There was a time at which people recognised things quite easily in pictures when it was Fromentin who had painted them, and could not recognise them at all when it was Renoir.

People of taste and refinement tell us nowadays that Renoir is one of the great painters of the last century. But in so saying they forget the element of Time, and that it took a great deal of time, well into the present century, before Renoir was hailed as a great artist. To succeed thus in gaining recognition, the original painter, the original writer proceeds on the lines adopted by oculists. The course of treatment they give us by their painting or by their prose is not always agreeable to us. When it is at an end the operator says to us: "Now look!" And, lo and behold, the world around us (which was not created once and for all, but is created afresh as often as an original artist is born) appears to us entirely different from the old world, but perfectly clear. Women pass in the street, different from what they used to be, because they are Renoirs, those Renoir types which we persistently refused to see as women. The carriages, too, are Renoirs, and the water, and the sky: we feel tempted to go for a walk in the forest which reminds us of that other which when we first saw it looked like anything in the world except a forest, like for instance a tapestry of innumerable shades but lacking precisely the shades proper to forests. Such is the new and perishable universe which has just been created. It will last until the next geological catastrophe is precipitated by a new painter or writer of original talent.

This writer who had taken Bergotte's place in my affections wearied me not by the incoherence but by the novelty of associations—perfectly coherent—which my mind was not trained to follow. The fact that it was always at the same point that I felt myself relinquish my grasp pointed to a common character in the efforts that I had always to make. Moreover, when once in a thousand times I did succeed in following the writer to the end of his sentence, what I saw there was always of a humour, a truth, a charm similar to those which I had found long ago in reading Bergotte, only more delightful. I reflected that it was not so many years since a similar reconstruction of the world, like that which I was waiting now for his successor to produce, had been wrought for me by Bergotte himself. Until I was led to ask myself whether there was indeed any truth in the distinction which we are always making between art, which is no more advanced now than in Homer's day, and science with its continuous progress. Perhaps, on the contrary, art was in this respect like science; each new writer seemed to me to have advanced beyond the stage of his immediate predecessor; and how was I to know that in twenty years' time, when I should be able to accompany without strain or effort the newcomer of to-day, another might not appear at whose approach he in turn would be packed off to the limbo to which his own coming would have consigned Bergotte?

I spoke to the latter of the new writer. He gave me a distaste for him not so much when he said that his art was uncouth, easy and vacuous, as when he told me that he had seen him, and had almost mistaken him (so strong was the likeness) for Bloch. From that moment my friend's features outlined themselves on the printed pages, and I no longer felt any obligation to make the effort necessary to understand them. If Bergotte had decried him to me it was less, I fancy, out of jealousy for a success that was yet to come than out of ignorance of his work. He read scarcely anything. The bulk of his thought had long since passed from his brain into his books. He had grown thin, as though they had been extracted from him by surgical operations. His reproductive instinct no longer impelled him to any activity, now that he had given an independent existence to almost all his thoughts. He led the vegetative life of a convalescent, of a woman after childbirth; his fine eyes remained motionless, vaguely dazed, like the eyes of a man who lies on the seashore and in a vague daydream sees only each little breaking wave. However, if it was less interesting to talk to him now than I should once have found it, I felt no compunction for that. He was so far a creature of habit that the simplest habits, like the most elaborate, once he had formed them, became indispensable to him for a certain length of time. I do not know what made him come to our house first of all, but after that every day it was simply because he had been there the day before. He would come to the house as he might have gone to a café, so that no one should talk to him, so that he might—very rarely—talk himself; one might in short have found in his conduct a sign that he was moved to sympathise with us in our anxiety, or that he enjoyed my company, had one sought to draw any conclusion from such an assiduity in calling. It did not fail to impress my mother, sensitive to everything that might be regarded as an act of homage to her invalid. And every day she reminded me: "See that you don't forget to thank him nicely."

We had also—a discreet feminine attention like the refreshments that are brought to us in the studio, between sittings, by a painter's mistress—a courteous supplement to those which her husband paid us professionally, a visit from Mme. Cottard. She came to offer us her 'waiting-woman,' or, if we preferred the services of a man, she would 'scour the country' for one, and, best of all, on our declining, said that she did hope this was not just a 'put-off' on our part, a word which in her world signifies a false pretext for not accepting an invitation. She assured us that the Professor, who never referred to his patients when he was at home, was as sad about it as if it had been she herself who was ill. We shall see in due course that even if this had been true it would have been at once a very small and a considerable admission on the part of the most faithless and the most attentive of husbands.

Offers as helpful and infinitely more touching owing to the form in which they were couched (which was a blend of the highest intelligence, the warmest sympathy, and a rare felicity of expression) were addressed to me by the Hereditary Grand Duke of Luxembourg. I had met him at Balbec where he had come on a visit to one of his aunts, the Princesse de Luxembourg, being himself at that time merely Comte de Nassau. He had married, some months later, the charming daughter of another Luxembourg Princess, extremely rich, because she was the only daughter of a Prince who was the proprietor of an immense flour-mill. Whereupon the Grand Duke of Luxembourg, who had no children of his own and was devoted to his nephew Nassau, had obtained the approval of his Chamber to his declaring the young man his heir. As with all marriages of this nature, the origin of the bride's fortune was the obstacle as it was also the deciding factor. I remembered this Comte de Nassau as one of the most striking young men I had ever met, already devoured, at that time, by a dark and blazing passion for his betrothed. I was deeply touched by the letters which he wrote me, day after day, during my grandmother's illness, and Mamma herself, in her emotion, quoted sadly one of her mother's expressions: "Sévigné would not have put it better."

On the sixth day Mamma, yielding to my grandmother's entreaties, left her for a little and pretended to go and lie down. I should have liked (so that my grandmother might go to sleep) Françoise to sit quite still and not disturb her by moving. In spite of my supplications, she got up and left the room; she was genuinely devoted to my grandmother; with her uncanny insight and her natural pessimism she regarded her as doomed. She would therefore have liked to pay her every possible attention. But word had just come that an electrician was in the house, one of the oldest servants of his firm, the head of which was his brother-in-law, highly esteemed throughout the building, where he had worked for many years, and especially by Jupien. This man had been ordered to come before my grandmother's illness. It seemed to me that he might have been sent away again, or told to wait. But Françoise's code of manners would not permit of this; it would have been a want of courtesy towards this worthy man; my grandmother's condition ceased at once to matter. When, after waiting a quarter of an hour, I lost my patience and went to look for her in the kitchen, I found her talking to him on the landing of the back staircase, the door of which stood open, a device which had the advantage, should any of us come on the scene, of letting it be thought that they were just saying good-bye, but had also the drawback of sending a terrible draught through the house. Françoise tore herself from the workman, not without turning to shout down after him various greetings, forgotten in her haste, to his wife and brother-in-law. A typical Combray scruple, not to be found wanting in politeness, which Françoise extended even to foreign politics. People foolishly imagine that the vast dimensions of social phenomena afford them an excellent opportunity to penetrate farther into the human soul; they ought, on the contrary, to realise that it is by plumbing the depths of a single personality that they might have a chance of understanding those phenomena. A thousand times over Françoise told the gardener at Combray that war was the most senseless of crimes, that life was the only thing that mattered. Yet, when the Russo-Japanese war broke out, she was quite ashamed, when she thought of the Tsar, that we had not gone to war also to help the 'poor Russians,' "since," she reminded us, "we're allianced to them." She felt this abstention to be not quite polite to Nicholas II, who had always "said such nice things about us"; it was a corollary of the same code which would have prevented her from refusing a glass of brandy from Jupien, knowing that it would 'upset' her digestion, and which brought it about that now, with my grandmother lying at death's door, the same meanness of which she considered France guilty in remaining neutral with regard to Japan she would have had to admit in herself, had she not gone in person to make her apologies to this good electrician who had been put to so much trouble.

Luckily for ourselves, we were soon rid of Françoise's daughter, who was obliged to be away for some weeks. To the regular stock of advice which people at Combray gave to the family of an invalid: "You haven't tried taking him away for a little . . . the change of air, you know . . . pick up an appetite . . . etc?" she had added the almost unique idea, which she had specially created in her own imagination, and repeated accordingly whenever we saw her, without fail, as though hoping by dint of reiteration to force it through the thickness of people's heads: "She ought to have taken herself in hand *radically* from the first." She did not recommend any one cure rather than another, provided that it were 'radical.' As for Françoise herself, she noticed that we were not giving my grandmother many medicines. Since, according to her, they only destroyed the stomach, she was quite glad of this, but at the same time even more humiliated. She had, in the South of France, some cousins—relatively well-to-do—whose daughter, after falling ill just as she was growing up, had died at twenty-three; for several years the father and mother had ruined themselves on drugs, on different doctors, on pilgrimages from one watering-place to another, until her decease. Now all this seemed to Françoise, for the parents in question, a kind of luxury, as though they had owned racehorses, or a place in the country. They themselves, in the midst of their affliction, derived a certain gratification from the thought of such lavish expenditure. They had now nothing left, least of all their most precious possession, their child, but they did enjoy telling people how they had done as much for her and more than the richest in the land. The ultra-violet rays to the action of which, several times a day for months on end, the poor girl had been subjected, delighted them more than anything. The father, elated in his grief by the glory of it all, was led to speak of his daughter at times as of an operatic star for whose sake he had ruined himself. Françoise was not unmoved by this wealth of scenic effect; that which framed my grandmother's sickbed seemed to her a trifle meagre, suited rather to an illness on the stage of a small provincial theatre.

There came a time when her uraemic trouble affected my grandmother's eyes. For some days she could not see at all. Her eyes were not at all like those of a blind person, but remained just the same as before. And I gathered that she could see nothing only from the strangeness of a certain smile of welcome which she assumed the moment one opened the door, until one had come up to her and taken her hand, a smile which began too soon and remained stereotyped on her lips, fixed, but always full-faced, and endeavouring to be visible from all points, because she could no longer rely upon her sight to regulate it, to indicate the right moment, the proper direction, to bring it to the point, to make it vary according to the change of position or of facial expression of the person who had come in; because it was left isolated, without the accompanying smile in her eyes which would have distracted a little from it the attention of the visitor, it assumed in its awkwardness an undue importance, giving one the impression of an exaggerated friendliness. Then her sight was completely restored; from her eyes the wandering affliction passed to her ears. For several days my grandmother was deaf. And as she was afraid of being taken by surprise by the sudden entry of some one whom she would not have heard come in, all day long, albeit she was lying with her face to the wall, she kept turning her head sharply towards the door. But the movement of her neck was clumsy, for one cannot adapt oneself in a few days to this transposition of faculties, so as, if not actually to see sounds, to listen with one's eyes. Finally her pain grew less, but the impediment of her speech increased. We were obliged to ask her to repeat almost everything that she said.

And now my grandmother, realising that we could no longer understand her, gave up altogether the attempt to speak and lay perfectly still. When she caught sight of me she gave a sort of convulsive start like a person who suddenly finds himself unable to breathe, but could make no intelligible sound. Then, overcome by her sheer powerlessness, she let her head drop on to the pillows, stretched herself out flat in her bed, her face grave, like a face of marble, her hands motionless on the sheet or occupied in some purely physical action such as that of wiping her fingers with her handkerchief. She made no effort to think. Then came a state of perpetual agitation. She was incessantly trying to get up. But we restrained her so far as we could from doing so, for fear of her discovering how paralysed she was. One day when she had been left alone for a moment I found her standing on the floor in her nightgown trying to open the window.

At Balbec, once, when a widow who had jumped into the sea had been rescued against her will, my grandmother had told me (moved perhaps by one of those presentiments which we discern at times in the mystery—so obscure, for all that—of the organic life around us, in which nevertheless it seems that our own future is foreshadowed) that she could think of nothing so cruel as to tear a poor wretch from the death that she had deliberately sought and restore her to her living martyrdom.

We were just in time to catch my grandmother, she put up an almost violent resistance to my mother, then, overpowered, seated forcibly in an armchair, she ceased to wish for death, to regret being alive, her face resumed its impassivity and she began laboriously to pick off the hairs that had been left on her nightgown by a fur cloak which somebody had thrown over her shoulders.

The look in her eyes changed completely; often uneasy, plaintive, haggard, it was no longer the look we knew, it was the sullen expression of a doddering old woman. . . .

By dint of repeatedly asking her whether she would not like her hair done, Françoise managed to persuade herself that the request had come from my grandmother. She armed herself with brushes, combs, eau de Cologne, a wrapper. "It can't hurt Madame Amédée," she said to herself, "if I just comb her; nobody's ever too ill for a good combing." In other words, one was never too weak for another person to be able, for her own satisfaction, to comb one. But when I came into the room I saw between the cruel hands of Françoise, as blissfully happy as though she were in the act of restoring my grandmother to health, beneath a thin rain of aged tresses which had not the strength to resist the action of the comb, a head which, incapable of maintaining the position into which it had been forced, was rolling to and fro with a ceaseless swirling motion in which sheer debility alternated with spasms of pain. I felt that the moment at which Françoise would have finished her task was approaching, and I dared not hasten it by suggesting to her: "That is enough," for fear of her disobeying me. But I did forcibly intervene when, in order that my grandmother might see whether her hair had been done to her liking, Françoise, with innocent savagery, brought her a glass. I was glad for the moment that I had managed to snatch it from her in time, before my grandmother, whom we had carefully kept without a mirror, could catch even a stray glimpse of a face unlike anything she could have imagined. But, alas, when, a moment later, I leaned over her to kiss that dear forehead which had been so harshly treated, she looked up at me with a puzzled, distrustful, shocked expression: she did not know me.

According to our doctor, this was a symptom that the congestion of her brain was increasing. It must be relieved in some way.

Cottard was in two minds. Françoise hoped at first that they were going to apply 'clarified cups.' She looked for the effects of this treatment in my dictionary, but could find no reference to it. Even if she had said 'scarified' instead of 'clarified' she still would not have found any reference to this adjective, since she did not look any more for it under 'S' than under 'C'; she did indeed say 'clarified' but she wrote (and consequently assumed that the printed word was) 'esclarified.' Cottard, to her disappointment, gave the preference, though without much hope, to leeches. When, a few hours later, I went into my grandmother's room, fastened to her neck, her temples, her ears, the tiny black serpents were writhing among her blood-stained locks, as on the head of Medusa. But in her pale and peaceful, entirely motionless face I saw wide open, luminous and calm, her own beautiful eyes, as in days gone by (perhaps even more charged with the light of intelligence than they had been before her illness, since, as she could not speak and must not move, it was to her eyes alone that she entrusted her thought, that thought which at one time occupies an immense place in us, offering us undreamed-of treasures, at another time seems reduced to nothing, then may be reborn, as though by spontaneous generation, by the withdrawal of a few drops of blood), her eyes, soft and liquid like two pools of oil in which the rekindled fire that was now burning lighted before the face of the invalid a reconquered universe. Her calm was no longer the wisdom of despair, but that of hope. She realised that she was better, wished to be careful, not to move, and made me the present only of a charming smile so that I should know that she was feeling better, as she gently pressed my hand.

I knew the disgust that my grandmother felt at the sight of certain animals, let alone being touched by them. I knew that it was in consideration of a higher utility that she was enduring the leeches. And so it infuriated me to hear Françoise repeating to her with that laugh which people use to a baby, to make it crow: "Oh, look at the little beasties running about on Madame." This was, moreover, treating our patient with a want of respect, as though she were in her second childhood. But my grandmother, whose face had assumed the calm fortitude of a stoic, did not seem even to hear her.

Alas! No sooner had the leeches been taken off than the congestion returned and grew steadily worse. I was surprised to find that at this stage, when my grandmother was so ill, Françoise was constantly disappearing. The fact was that she had ordered herself a mourning dress, and did not wish to keep her dressmaker waiting. In the lives of most women, everything, even the greatest sorrow, resolves itself into a question of 'trying-on.'

A few days later, when I was in bed and sleeping, my mother came to call me in the early hours of the morning. With that tender consideration which, in great crises, people who are crushed by grief shew even for the slightest discomfort of others:

"Forgive me for disturbing your sleep," she said to me.

"I was not asleep," I answered as I awoke.

I said this in good faith. The great modification which the act of awakening effects in us is not so much that of introducing us to the clear life of consciousness, as that of making us lose all memory of that other, rather more diffused light in which our mind has been resting, as in the opaline depths of the sea. The tide of thought, half veiled from our perception, over which we were drifting still a moment ago, kept us in a state of motion perfectly sufficient to enable us to refer to it by the name of wakefulness. But then our actual awakenings produce an interruption of memory. A little later we describe these states as sleep because we no longer remember them. And when shines that bright star which at the moment of waking illuminates behind the sleeper the whole expanse of his sleep, it makes him imagine for a few moments that this was not a sleeping but a waking state; a shooting star, it must be added, which blots out with the fading of its light not only the false existence but the very appearance of our dream, and merely enables him who has awoken to say to himself: "I was asleep."

In a voice so gentle that she seemed to be afraid of hurting me, my mother asked whether it would tire me too much to get out of bed, and, stroking my hands, went on:

"My poor boy, you have only your Papa and Mamma to help you now."

We went into the sickroom. Bent in a semicircle on the bed a creature other than my grandmother, a sort of wild beast which was coated with her hair and couched amid her bedclothes lay panting, groaning, making the blankets heave with its convulsions. The eyelids were closed, and it was because the one nearer me did not shut properly, rather than because it opened at all that it left visible a chink of eye, misty, filmed, reflecting the dimness both of an organic sense of vision and of a hidden, internal pain. All this agitation was not addressed to us, whom she neither saw nor knew. But if this was only a beast that was stirring there, where could my grandmother be? Yes, I could recognise the shape of her nose, which bore no relation now to the rest of her face, but to the corner of which a beauty spot still adhered, and the hand that kept thrusting the blankets aside with a gesture which formerly would have meant that those blankets were pressing upon her, but now meant nothing.

Mamma asked me to go for a little vinegar and water with which to sponge my grandmother's forehead. It was the only thing that refreshed her, thought Mamma, who saw that she was trying to push back her hair. But now one of the servants was signalling to me from the doorway. The news that my grandmother was in the last throes had spread like wildfire through the house. One of those 'extra helps' whom people engage at exceptional times to relieve the strain on their servants (a practice which gives deathbeds an air of being social functions) had just opened the front door to the Duc de Guermantes, who was now waiting in the hall and had asked for me: I could not escape him.

"I have just, my dear Sir, heard your tragic news. I should like, as a mark of sympathy, to shake hands with your father." I made the excuse that I could not very well disturb him at the moment. M. de Guermantes was like a caller who turns up just as one is about to start on a journey. But he felt so intensely the importance of the courtesy he was shewing us that it blinded him to all else, and he insisted upon being taken into the drawing-room. As a general rule, he made a point of going resolutely through the formalities with which he had decided to honour anyone, and took little heed that the trunks were packed or the coffin ready.

"Have you sent for Dieulafoy? No? That was a great mistake. And if you had only asked me, I would have got him to come, he never refuses me anything, although he has refused the Duchesse de Chartres before now. You see, I set myself above a Princess of the Blood. However, in the presence of death we are all equal," he added, not that he meant to suggest that my grandmother was becoming his equal, but probably because he felt that a prolonged discussion of his power over Dieulafoy and his pre-eminence over the Duchesse de Chartres would not be in very good taste.

This advice did not in the least surprise me. I knew that, in the Guermantes set, the name of Dieulafoy was regularly quoted (only with slightly more respect) among those of other tradesmen who were 'quite the best' in their respective lines. And the old Duchesse de Mortemart *née* Guermantes (I never could understand, by the way, why, the moment one speaks of a Duchess, one almost invariably says: "The old Duchess of So-and-so," or, alternatively, in a delicate Watteau tone, if she is still young: "The little Duchess of So-and-so,") would prescribe almost automatically, with a droop of the eyelid, in serious cases: "Dieulafoy, Dieulafoy!" as, if one wanted a place for ices, she would advise: 'Poiré Blanche,' or for small pastry 'Rebattet, Rebattet.' But I was not aware that my father had, as a matter of fact, just sent for Dieulafoy.

At this point my mother, who was waiting impatiently for some cylinders of oxygen which would help my grandmother to breathe more easily, came out herself to the hall where she little expected to find M. de Guermantes. I should have liked to conceal him, had that been possible. But convinced in his own mind that nothing was more essential, could be more gratifying to her or more indispensable to the maintenance of his reputation as a perfect gentleman, he seized me violently by the arm and, although I defended myself as against an assault with repeated protestations of "Sir, Sir, Sir," dragged me across to Mamma, saying: "Will you do me the great honour of presenting me to your mother?" letting go a little as he came to the last word. And it was so plain to him that the honour was hers that he could not help smiling at her even while he was composing a grave face. There was nothing for it but to mention his name, the sound of which at once started him bowing and scraping, and he was just going to begin the complete ritual of salutation. He apparently proposed to enter into conversation, but my mother, overwhelmed by her grief, told me to come at once and did not reply to the speeches of M. de Guermantes who, expecting to be received as a visitor and finding himself instead left alone in the hall, would have been obliged to retire had he not at that moment caught sight of Saint-Loup who had arrived in Paris that morning and had come to us in haste to inquire for news. "I say, this is a piece of luck!" cried the Duke joyfully, catching his nephew by the sleeve, which he nearly tore off, regardless of the presence of my mother who was again crossing the hall. Saint-Loup was not sorry, I fancy, despite his genuine sympathy, at having missed seeing me, considering his attitude towards myself. He left the house, carried off by his uncle who, having had something very important to say to him and having very nearly gone down to Doncières on purpose to say it, was beside himself with joy at being able to save himself so much exertion. "Upon my soul, if anybody had told me I had only to cross the courtyard and I should find you here, I should have thought it a huge joke; as your friend M. Bloch would say, it's a regular farce." And as he disappeared down the stairs with Robert whom he held by the shoulder:

"All the same," he went on, "it's quite clear I must have touched the hangman's rope or something; I do have the most astounding luck." Not that the Duc de Guermantes was ill-bred; far from it. But he was one of those men who are incapable of putting themselves in the place of other people, who resemble in that respect undertakers and the majority of doctors, and who, after composing their faces and saying: "This is a very painful occasion," after, if need be, embracing you and advising you to rest, cease to regard a deathbed or a funeral as anything but a social gathering of a more or less restricted kind at which, with a joviality that has been checked for a moment only, they scan the room in search of the person whom they can tell about their own little affairs, or ask to introduce them to some one else, or offer a 'lift' in their carriage when it is time to go home. The Duc de Guermantes, while congratulating himself on the 'good wind' that had blown him into the arms of his nephew, was still so surprised at the reception—natural as it was—that had been given him by my mother, that he declared later on that she was as disagreeable as my father was civil, that she had 'absent fits' during which she seemed literally not to hear a word you said to her, and that in his opinion she had no self-possession and perhaps even was not quite 'all there.' At the same time he had been quite prepared (according to what I was told) to put this state of mind down, in part at any rate, to the circumstances, and declared that my mother had seemed to him greatly 'affected' by the sad event. But he had still stored up in his limbs all the residue of bows and reverences which he had been prevented from using up, and had so little idea of the real nature of Mamma's sorrow that he asked me, the day before the funeral, if I was not doing anything to distract her.

A half-brother of my grandmother, who was in religion, and whom I had never seen, had telegraphed to Austria, where the head of his Order was, and having as a special privilege obtained leave, arrived that day. Bowed down with grief, he sat by the bedside reading prayers and meditations from a book, without, however, taking his gimlet eyes from the invalid's face. At one point, when my grandmother was unconscious, the sight of this cleric's grief began to upset me, and I looked at him tenderly. He appeared surprised by my pity, and then an odd thing happened. He joined his hands in front of his face, like a man absorbed in painful meditation, but, on the assumption that I would then cease to watch him, left, as I observed, a tiny chink between his fingers. And at the moment when my gaze left his face, I saw his sharp eye, which had been making use of its vantage-point behind his hands to observe whether my sympathy were sincere. He was hidden there as in the darkness of a confessional. He saw that I was still looking and at once shut tight the lattice which he had left ajar. I have met him again since then, but never has any reference been made by either of us to that minute. It was tacitly agreed that I had not noticed that he was spying on me. In the priest as in the alienist, there is always an element of the examining magistrate. Besides, what friend is there, however cherished, in whose and our common past there has not been some such episode which we find it convenient to believe that he must have forgotten?

The doctor gave my grandmother an injection of morphine, and to make her breathing less troublesome ordered cylinders of oxygen. My mother, the doctor, the nursing sister held these in their hands; as soon as one was exhausted another was put in its place. I had left the room for a few minutes. When I returned I found myself face to face with a miracle. Accompanied on a muted instrument by an incessant murmur, my grandmother seemed to be greeting us with a long and blissful chant, which filled the room, rapid and musical. I soon realized that this was scarcely less unconscious, that it was as purely mechanical as the hoarse rattle that I had heard before leaving the room. Perhaps to a slight extent it reflected some improvement brought about by the morphine. Principally it was the result (the air not passing quite in the same way through the bronchial tubes) of a change in the register of her breathing. Released by the twofold action of the oxygen and the morphine, my grandmother's breath no longer laboured, panted, groaned, but, swift and light, shot like a skater along the delicious stream. Perhaps with her breath, unconscious like that of the wind in the hollow stem of a reed, there were blended in this chant some of those more human sighs which, liberated at the approach of death, make us imagine impressions of suffering or happiness in minds which already have ceased to feel, and these sighs came now to add a more melodious accent, but without changing its rhythm, to that long phrase which rose, mounted still higher, then declined, to start forth afresh, from her unburdened bosom in quest of the oxygen. Then, having risen to so high a pitch, having been sustained with so much vigour, the chant, mingled with a murmur of supplication from the midst of her ecstasy, seemed at times to stop altogether like a spring that has ceased to flow.

Françoise, in any great sorrow, felt the need but did not possess the art—as simple as that need was futile—of giving it expression. Regarding my grandmother's case as quite hopeless, it was her own personal impressions that she was impelled to communicate to us. And all that she could do was to repeat: "It makes me feel all queer," in the same tone in which she would say, when she had taken too large a plateful of cabbage broth: "It's like a load on my stomach," sensations both of which were more natural than she seemed to think. Though so feebly expressed, her grief was nevertheless very great, and was aggravated moreover by her annoyance that her daughter, detained at Combray (to which this young Parisian now referred as 'the Cambrousse' and where she felt herself growing *'pétrousse,'* in other words fossilised), would not, presumably, be able to return in time for the funeral ceremony, which was certain, Françoise felt, to be a superb spectacle. Knowing that we were not inclined to be expansive, she made Jupien promise at all costs to keep every evening in the week free. She knew that he would be engaged elsewhere at the hour of the funeral. She was determined at least to 'go over it all' with him on his return.

For several nights now my father, my grandfather and one of our cousins had been sitting up, and never left the house during the day. Their continuous devotion ended by assuming a mask of indifference, and their interminable leisure round the deathbed made them indulge in that small talk which is an inseparable accompaniment of prolonged confinement in a railway carriage. Anyhow this cousin (a nephew of my great-aunt) aroused in me an antipathy as strong as the esteem which he deserved and generally enjoyed. He was always 'sent for' in times of great trouble, and was so assiduous in his attentions to the dying that their mourning families, on the pretext that he was in delicate health, despite his robust appearance, his bass voice and bristling beard, invariably besought him, with the customary euphemisms, not to come to the cemetery. I could tell already that Mamma, who thought of others in the midst of the most crushing grief, would soon be saying to him, in a very different form of words, what he was in the habit of hearing said on all such occasions:

"Promise me that you won't come 'to-morrow.' Please, for 'her sake.' At any rate, you won't go 'all the way.' It's what she would have wished."

But there was nothing for it; he was always the first to arrive 'at the house,' by reason of which he had been given, among another set, the nickname (unknown to us) of 'No flowers by request.' And before attending everything he had always 'attended to everything,' which entitled him to the formula: "We don't know how to thank you."

"What's that?" came in a loud voice from my grandfather, who had grown rather deaf and had failed to catch something which our cousin had just said to my father.

"Nothing," answered the cousin. "I was just saying that I'd heard from Combray this morning. The weather is appalling down there, and here we've got too much sun."

"Yet the barometer is very low," put in my father.

"Where did you say the weather was bad?" asked my grandfather.

"At Combray."

"Ah! I'm not surprised; whenever it's bad here it's fine at Combray, and vice versa. Good gracious! Talking of Combray, has anyone remembered to tell Legrandin?"

"Yes, don't worry about that, it's been done," said my cousin, whose cheeks, bronzed by an irrepressible growth of beard, dimpled faintly with the satisfaction of having 'remembered' it.

At this point my father hurried from the room. I supposed that a sudden change, for better or worse, had occurred. It was simply that Dr. Dieulafoy had just arrived. My father went to receive him in the drawing-room, like the actor who is to come next on the stage. We had sent for him not to cure but to certify, in almost a legal capacity. Dr. Dieulafoy might indeed be a great physician, a marvellous professor; to these several parts, in which he excelled, he added a third, in which he remained for forty years without a rival, a part as original as that of the arguer, the scaramouch or the noble father, which consisted in coming to certify an agony or a death. The mere sound of his name foreshadowed the dignity with which he would sustain the part, and when the servant announced: "M. Dieulafoy," one imagined oneself at a play by Molière. To the dignity of his attitude was added, without being conspicuous, the suppleness of a perfect figure. A face in itself too good-looking was toned down by the convention due to distressing circumstances. In the sable majesty of his frock coat the Professor entered the room, melancholy without affectation, uttered not the least word of condolence, which might have been thought insincere, nor was he guilty of the slightest infringement of the rules of tact. At the foot of a deathbed it was he and not the Duc de Guermantes who was the great gentleman. Having examined my grandmother, but not so as to tire her, and with an excess of reserve which was an act of courtesy to the doctor who was treating the case, he murmured a few words to my father, bowed respectfully to my mother to whom I felt that my father had positively to restrain himself from saying: "Professor Dieulafoy." But already our visitor had turned away, not wishing to seem to be soliciting an introduction, and left the room in the most polished manner conceivable, simply taking with him the sealed envelope that was slipped into his hand. He had not appeared to see it, and we ourselves were left wondering for a moment whether we had really given it to him, such a conjurer's nimbleness had he put into the act of making it vanish without thereby losing anything of the gravity—which was increased rather—of the great consultant in his long frock coat with its silken lapels, and his handsome head full of a noble commiseration. The slowness and vivacity of his movements shewed that, even if he had a hundred other visits to pay and patients waiting, he refused to appear hurried. For he was the embodiment of tact, intelligence and kindness. That eminent man is no longer with us. Other physicians, other professors may have rivalled, may indeed have surpassed him. But the 'capacity' in which his knowledge, his physical endowments, his distinguished manners made him triumph exists no longer for want of any successor capable of taking his place. Mamma had not even noticed M. Dieulafoy, everything that was not my grandmother having no existence for her. I remember (and here I anticipate) that at the cemetery, where we saw her, like a supernatural apparition, go up timidly to the grave and seem to be gazing in the wake of a flying form that was already far away, my father having remarked to her: "Old Norpois came to the house and to the church and on here; he gave up a most important committee meeting to come; you ought really to say a word to him, he'll be so gratified if you do," my mother, when the Ambassador stood before her and bowed, could do no more than gently incline a face that shewed no tears. A couple of days earlier—to anticipate once again before returning to where we were just now by the bed on which my grandmother lay dying—while they were watching by the body, Françoise, who, not disbelieving entirely in ghosts, was terrified by the least sound, had said: "I believe that's her." But in place of fear it was an ineffable sweetness that her words aroused in my mother, who would have been so glad that the dead should return, to have her mother with her sometimes still.

To return now to those last hours, "You heard about the telegram her sisters sent us?" my grandfather asked the cousin.

"Yes, Beethoven, they told me about it, it's worth framing; still, I'm not surprised."

"My poor wife, who was so fond of them, too," said my grandfather, wiping away a tear. "We mustn't blame them. They're stark mad, both of them, as I've always said. What's the matter now; aren't you going on with the oxygen?"

My mother spoke: "Oh, but then Mamma will be having more trouble with her breathing."

The doctor reassured her: "Oh, no! The effect of the oxygen will last a good while yet; we can begin it again presently."

It seemed to me that he would not have said this of a dying woman, that if this good effect were to last it meant that we could still do something to keep her alive. The hiss of the oxygen ceased for a few moments. But the happy plaint of her breathing poured out steadily, light, troubled, unfinished, without end, beginning afresh. Now and then it seemed that all was over, her breath stopped, whether owing to one of those transpositions to another octave that occur in the breathing of a sleeper, or else from a natural interruption, an effect of unconsciousness, the progress of asphyxia, some failure of the heart. The doctor stooped to feel my grandmother's pulse, but already, as if a tributary were pouring its current into the dried river-bed, a fresh chant broke out from the interrupted measure. And the first was resumed in another pitch with the same inexhaustible force. Who knows whether, without indeed my grandmother's being conscious of them, a countless throng of happy and tender memories compressed by suffering were not escaping from her now, like those lighter gases which had long been compressed in the cylinders? One would have said that everything that she had to tell us was pouring out, that it was to us that she was addressing herself with this prolixity, this earnestness, this effusion. At the foot of the bed, convulsed by every gasp of this agony, not weeping but now and then drenched with tears, my mother presented the unreasoning desolation of a leaf which the rain lashes and the wind twirls on its stem. They made me dry my eyes before I went up to kiss my grandmother.

"But I thought she couldn't see anything now?" said my father.

"One can never be sure," replied the doctor.

When my lips touched her face, my grandmother's hands quivered, a long shudder ran through her whole body, reflex perhaps, perhaps because certain affections have their hyperaesthesia which recognises through the veil of unconsciousness what they barely need senses to enable them to love. Suddenly my grandmother half rose, made a violent effort, as though struggling to resist an attempt on her life. Françoise could not endure this sight and burst out sobbing. Remembering what the doctor had just said I tried to make her leave the room. At that moment my grandmother opened her eyes. I thrust myself hurriedly in front of Françoise to hide her tears, while my parents were speaking to the sufferer. The sound of the oxygen had ceased; the doctor moved away from the bedside. My grandmother was dead.

An hour or two later Françoise was able for the last time, and without causing them any pain, to comb those beautiful tresses which had only begun to turn grey and hitherto had seemed not so old as my grandmother herself. But now on the contrary it was they alone that set the crown of age on a face grown young again, from which had vanished the wrinkles, the contractions, the swellings, the strains, the hollows which in the long course of years had been carved on it by suffering. As at the far-off time when her parents had chosen for her a bridegroom, she had the features delicately traced by purity and submission, the cheeks glowing with a chaste expectation, with a vision of happiness, with an innocent gaiety even, which the years had gradually destroyed. Life in withdrawing from her had taken with it the disillusionments of life. A smile seemed to be hovering on my grandmother's lips. On that funeral couch, death, like a sculptor of the middle ages, had laid her in the form of a young maiden.

CHAPTER TWO

A VISIT FROM ALBERTINE

ALBEIT it was simply a Sunday in autumn, I had been born again, life lay intact before me, for that morning, after a succession of mild days, there had been a cold mist which had not cleared until nearly midday. A change in the weather is sufficient to create the world and oneself anew. Formerly, when the wind howled in my chimney, I would listen to the blows which it struck on the iron trap with as keen an emotion as if, like the famous bow-taps with which the C Minor Symphony opens, they had been the irresistible appeal of a mysterious destiny. Every change in the aspect of nature offers us a similar transformation by adapting our desires so as to harmonise with the new form of things. The mist, from the moment of my awakening, had made of me, instead of the centrifugal being which one is on fine days, a self-centred man, longing for the chimney corner and the nuptial couch, a shivering Adam in quest of a sedentary Eve, in this different world.

Between the soft grey tint of a morning landscape and the taste of a cup of chocolate I tried to account for all the originality of the physical, intellectual and moral life which I had taken with me, about a year earlier, to Doncières, and which, blazoned with the oblong form of a bare hillside—always present even when it was invisible—formed in me a series of pleasures entirely distinct from all others, incommunicable to my friends, in the sense that the impressions, richly interwoven with one another, which gave them their orchestral accompaniment were a great deal more characteristic of them, to my subconscious mind, than any facts that I might have related. From this point of view the new world in which the mist of this morning had immersed me was a world already known to me (which only made it more real) and forgotten for some time (which restored all its novelty). And I was able to look at several of the pictures of misty landscapes which my memory had acquired, notably a series of 'Mornings at Doncières,' including my first morning there in barracks and another, in a neighbouring country house, where I had gone with Saint-Loup to spend the night: in which from the windows, whose curtains I had drawn back at daybreak, before getting into bed again, in the first a trooper, in the second (on the thin margin of a pond and a wood all the rest of which was engulfed in the uniform and liquid softness of the mist) a coachman busy polishing a strap had appeared to me like those rare figures, scarcely visible to the eye obliged to adapt itself to the mysterious vagueness of their half-lights, which emerge from an obliterated fresco.

It was from my bed that I was looking this afternoon at these pictorial memories, for I had gone back to bed to wait until the hour came at which, taking advantage of the absence of my parents, who had gone for a few days to Combray, I proposed to get up and go to a little play which was being given that evening in Mme. de Villeparisis's drawing-room. Had they been at home I should perhaps not have ventured to go out; my mother, in the delicacy of her respect for my grandmother's memory, wished the tokens of regret that were paid to it to be freely and sincerely given; she would not have forbidden me this outing, she would have disapproved of it. From Combray, on the other hand, had I consulted her wishes, she would not have replied in a melancholy: "Do just as you like; you are old enough now to know what is right or wrong," but, reproaching herself for having left me alone in Paris, and measuring my grief by her own, would have wished for it distractions of a sort which she would have refused to herself, and which she persuaded herself that my grandmother, solicitous above all things for my health and the preservation of my nervous balance, would have advised me to take.

That morning the furnace of the new steam heater had for the first time been lighted. Its disagreeable sound—an intermittent hiccough—had no part whatsoever in my memories of Doncières. But its prolonged encounter, in me this afternoon, with them was to give it so lasting an affinity with them that whenever, after succeeding more or less in forgetting it, I heard the central heater hiccough again it reminded me of them.

There was no one else in the house but Françoise. The grey light, falling like a fine rain on the earth, wove without ceasing a transparent web through which the Sunday holiday-makers appeared in a silvery sheen. I had flung to the foot of my bed the *Figaro*, for which I had been sending out religiously every morning, ever since I had sent in an article which it had not yet printed; despite the absence of the sun, the intensity of the daylight was an indication that we were still only half-way through the afternoon. The tulle window-curtains, vaporous and friable as they would not have been on a fine day, had that same blend of beauty and fragility that dragon flies' wings have, and Venetian glass. It depressed me all the more that I should be spending this Sunday by myself because I had sent a note that morning to Mlle. de Stermaria. Robert de Saint-Loup, whom his mother had at length succeeded in parting—after painful and abortive attempts—from his mistress, and who immediately afterwards had been sent to Morocco in the hope of his there forgetting one whom he had already for some little time ceased to love, had sent me a line, which had reached me the day before, announcing his arrival, presently, in France for a short spell of leave. As he would only be passing through Paris (where his family were doubtless afraid of seeing him renew relations with Rachel), he informed me, to shew me that he had been thinking of me, that he had met at Tangier Mlle. or rather Mme. (for she had divorced her husband three months after their marriage) de Stermaria. And Robert, remembering what I had told him at Balbec, had asked her, on my behalf, to arrange a meeting. She would be delighted to dine with me, she had told him, on one of the evenings which, before her return to Brittany, she would be spending in Paris. He warned me to lose no time in writing to Mme. de Stermaria, for she would certainly have arrived before I got his letter. This had come as no surprise to me, even although I had had no news of him since, at the time of my grandmother's last illness, he had accused me of perfidy and treachery. It had then been quite easy to see what must have happened. Rachel, who liked to provoke his jealousy—she had other reasons also for wishing me harm—had persuaded her lover that I had made a dastardly attempt to have relations with her in his absence. It is probable that he continued to believe in the truth of this allegation, but he had ceased to be in love with her, which meant that its truth or falsehood had become a matter of complete indifference to him, and our friendship alone remained. When, on meeting him again, I attempted to speak to him about his attack on me his sole answer was a cordial and friendly smile, which gave him the air of begging my pardon; then he turned the conversation to something else. All this was not to say that he did not, a little later, see Rachel occasionally when he was in Paris. The fellow-creatures who have played a leading part in one's life very rarely disappear from it suddenly with any finality. They return to take their old place in it at odd moments (so much so as to lead people to believe in a renewal of old love) before leaving it for ever. Saint-Loup's breach with Rachel had very soon become less painful to him, thanks to the soothing pleasure that was given him by her incessant demands for money. Jealousy, which prolongs the course of love, is not capable of containing many more ingredients than are the other forms of imagination. If one takes with one, when one starts on a journey, three or four images which incidentally one is sure to lose on the way (such as the lilies and anemones heaped on the Ponte Vecchio, or the Persian church shrouded in mist), one's trunk is already pretty full. When one parts from a mistress one would be just as glad, until one has begun to forget her, that she should not become the property of three or four potential protectors whom one has in one's mind's eye, of whom, that is to say, one is jealous: all those whom one does not so picture count for nothing. Now frequent demands for money from a cast-off mistress no more give one a complete idea of her life than charts shewing a high temperature would of her illness. But the latter would at any rate be an indication that she was ill, and the former furnish a presumption, vague enough, it is true, that the forsaken one, or forsaker (whichever she be) cannot have found anything very remarkable in the way of rich protectors. And so each demand is welcomed with the joy which a lull produces in the jealous one's sufferings, while he responds to it at once by dispatching money, for naturally he does not like to think of her being in want of anything, except lovers (one of the three lovers he has in his mind's eye), until time has enabled him to regain his composure and he can learn without the slightest emotion the name of his successor. Sometimes Rachel came in so late at night that she could ask her former lover's permission to lie down beside him until the morning. This was a great comfort to Robert, for it refreshed his memory of how they had, after all, lived in intimacy together merely to see that even if he took the greater part of the bed for himself it did not in the least interfere with her sleep. He realised that she was more comfortable, lying close to his body, than she would have been elsewhere, that she felt herself, by his side—even in an hotel—to be in a bedroom known of old, in which the force of habit prevails and one sleeps better. He felt that his shoulders, his limbs, all of him were for her, even when he was unduly restless, from sleeplessness or from having to get up in the night, things so entirely usual that they could not disturb her, and that the perception of them added still further to her sense of repose.

To revert to where we were, I had been all the more disquieted by Robert's letter in that I could read between the lines what he had not ventured to write more explicitly. "You can most certainly ask her to dine in a private room," he told me. "She is a charming young person, a delightful nature, you will get on splendidly with her, and I am sure you will have a capital evening together." As my parents were returning at the end of the week, on Saturday or Sunday, and as after that I should be forced to dine every evening at home, I had written at once to Mme. de Stermaria, proposing any evening that might suit her, up to Friday. A message was brought back that I should hear from her in writing the same evening, about eight o'clock. The time would have passed quickly enough if I had had, during the afternoon that separated me from her letter, the help of a visit from anyone else. When the hours pass wrapped in conversation one ceases to count, or indeed to notice them, they vanish, and suddenly it is a long way beyond the point at which it escaped you that there reappears the nimble truant time. But if we are alone, our preoccupation, by bringing before us the still distant and incessantly awaited moment with the frequency and uniformity of a ticking pendulum, divides, or rather multiplies the hours by all the minutes which, had we been with friends, we should not have counted. And confronted, by the incessant return of my desire, with the ardent pleasure which I was going to taste—not for some days though, alas!—in Mme. de Stermaria's company, this afternoon, which I should have to spend by myself, seemed to me very empty and very melancholy.

Every now and then I heard the sound of the lift coming up, but it was followed by a second sound, not that for which I was hoping, namely the sound of its coming to a halt at our landing, but another very different sound which the lift made in continuing its progress to the floors above and which, because it so often meant the desertion of my floor when I was expecting a visitor, remained for me at other times, even when I had no wish to see anyone, a sound lugubrious in itself, in which there echoed, as it were, a sentence of solitary confinement. Weary, resigned, busy for several hours still over its immemorial task, the grey day stitched its shimmering needlework of light and shade, and it saddened me to think that I was to be left alone with a thing that knew me no more than would a seamstress who, installed by the window so as to see better while she finished her work, paid no attention to the person present with her in the room. Suddenly, although I had heard no bell, Françoise opened the door to let in Albertine, who came forward smiling, silent, plump, containing in the fulness of her body, made ready so that I might continue living them, come in search of me, the days we had spent together at that Balbec to which I had never since returned. No doubt, whenever we see again a person with whom our relations—however trivial they may have been—are altered, it is like a juxtaposition of two different periods. For this, we do not require that a former mistress should come to call upon us as a friend, all that we need is the visit to Paris of a person whom we had known in the daily round of some particular kind of life, and that this life should have ceased for us, were it no more than a week ago. On each of Albertine's smiling, questioning, blushing features I could read the questions: "And Madame de Villeparisis? And the dancing-master? And the pastry-cook?" When she sat down her back seemed to be saying: "Gracious! There's no cliff here; you don't mind if I sit down beside you, all the same, as I used to do at Balbec?" She was like an enchantress handing me a mirror that reflected time. In this she was like all the people whom we seldom see now but with whom at one time we lived on more intimate terms. With Albertine, however, there was something more than this. Certainly, even at Balbec, in our daily encounters, I had always been surprised when she came in sight, so variable was her appearance from day to day. But now it was difficult to recognise her. Cleared of the pink vapour that used to bathe them, her features had emerged like those of a statue. She had another face, or rather she had a face at last; her body too had grown. There remained scarcely anything now of the shell in which she had been enclosed and on the surface of which, at Balbec, her future outline had been barely visible.

This time, Albertine had returned to Paris earlier than usual. As a rule she came only in the spring, which meant that, already disturbed for some weeks past by the storms that were beating down the first flowers, I did not distinguish, in the elements of the pleasure that I felt, the return of Albertine from that of the fine weather. It was enough that I should be told that she was in Paris and that she had called at the house, for me to see her again like a rose flowering by the sea. I cannot say whether it was the desire for Balbec or for herself that overcame me at such moments; possibly my desire for her was itself a lazy, cowardly, and incomplete method of possessing Balbec, as if to possess a thing materially, to take up one's abode in a town, were equivalent to possessing it spiritually. Besides, even materially, when she was no longer posed by my imagination before a horizon of sea, but sitting still in a room with me, she seemed to me often a very poor specimen of a rose, so poor, indeed, that I would gladly have shut my eyes in order not to observe this or that blemish of its petals, and to imagine instead that I was inhaling the salt air on the beach.

I must say it at this point, albeit I was not then aware of what was to happen only later on. Certainly, it is more reasonable to devote one's life to women than to postage stamps or old snuff-boxes, even to pictures or statues. Only the example of other collectors should be a warning to us to make changes, to have not one woman only but several. Those charming suggestions in which a girl abounds of a sea-beach, of the braided hair of a statue in church, of an old print, of everything that makes one see and admire in her, whenever she appears, a charming composition, those suggestions are not very stable. Live with a woman altogether and you will soon cease to see any of the things that made you love her; though I must add that these two sundered elements can be reunited by jealousy. If, after a long period of life in common, I was to end by seeing nothing more in Albertine than an ordinary woman, an intrigue between her and some person whom she had loved at Balbec would still suffice, perhaps, to reincorporate in her, to amalgamate the beach and the unrolling of the tide. Only, as these secondary suggestions no longer captivate our eyes, it is to the heart that they are perceptible and fatal. We cannot, under so dangerous a form, regard the repetition of the miracle as a thing to be desired. But I am anticipating the course of years. And here I need only state my regret that I did not have the sense simply to have kept my collection of women as people keep their collections of old quizzing glasses, never so complete, in their cabinet, that there is not room always for another and rarer still.

Departing from the customary order of her holiday movements, this year she had come straight from Balbec, where furthermore she had not stayed nearly so late as usual. It was a long time since I had seen her, and as I did not know even by name the people with whom she was in the habit of mixing in Paris, I could form no impression of her during the periods in which she abstained from coming to see me. These lasted often for quite a time. Then, one fine day, in would burst Albertine whose rosy apparitions and silent visits left me little if any better informed as to what she might have been doing in an interval which remained plunged in that darkness of her hidden life which my eyes felt little anxiety to pierce.

This time, however, certain signs seemed to indicate that some new experience must have entered into that life. And yet, perhaps, all that one was entitled to conclude from them was that girls change very rapidly at the age which Albertine had now reached. For instance, her intellect was now more in evidence, and on my reminding her of the day when she had insisted with so much ardour on the superiority of her idea of making Sophocles write: "My dear Racine," she was the first to laugh, quite wholeheartedly, at her own stupidity. "Andrée was quite right; it was stupid of me," she admitted. "Sophocles ought to have begun: 'Sir.' " I replied that the 'Sir,' and 'Dear Sir,' of Andrée were no less comic than her own 'My dear Racine,' or Gisèle's 'My dear Friend,' but that after all the really stupid people were the Professors who still went on making Sophocles write letters to Racine. Here, however, Albertine was unable to follow me. She could not see in what the silliness consisted; her intelligence was dawning, but had not fully developed. There were other more attractive novelties in her; I felt, in this same pretty girl who had just sat down by my bed, something that was different; and in those lines which, in one's eyes and other features, express one's general attitude towards life, a change of front, a partial conversion, as though there had now been shattered those resistances against which I had hurled my strength in vain at Balbec, one evening, now remote in time, on which we formed a couple symmetrical with but the converse of our present arrangement, since then it had been she who was lying down and I who sat by her bedside. Wishing and not venturing to make certain whether now she would let herself be kissed, every time that she rose to go I asked her to stay beside me a little longer. This was a concession not very easy to obtain, for albeit she had nothing to do (otherwise she would have rushed from the house) she was a person methodical in her habits and moreover not very gracious towards me, seeming scarcely to be at ease in my company, and yet each time, after looking at her watch, she sat down again at my request until finally she had spent several hours with me without my having asked her for anything; the things I was saying to her followed logically those that I had said during the hours before, and bore no relation to what I was thinking about, what I desired from her, remained indefinitely parallel. There is nothing like desire for preventing the thing one says from bearing any resemblance to what one has in one's mind. Time presses, and yet it seems as though we were seeking to gain time by speaking of subjects absolutely alien to that by which we are obsessed. We then arrange that the sentence which we should like to utter shall be accompanied, or rather preluded, by a gesture, supposing that is to say that we have not to give ourselves the pleasure of an immediate demonstration and to gratify the curiosity we feel as to the reactions which will follow it, without a word said, without even a 'By your leave,' already made this gesture. Certainly I was not in the least in love with Albertine; child of the mists outside, she could merely content the imaginative desire which the change of weather had awakened in me and which was midway between the desires that are satisfied by the arts of the kitchen and of monumental sculpture respectively, for it made me dream simultaneously of mingling with my flesh a substance different and warm, and of attaching at some point to my outstretched body a body divergent, as the body of Eve barely holds by the feet to the side of Adam, to whose body hers is almost perpendicular, in those romanesque bas-reliefs on the church at Balbec which represent in so noble and so reposeful a fashion, still almost like a classical frieze, the Creation of Woman; God in them is everywhere followed, as by two ministers, by two little angels in whom the visitor recognises—like winged, swarming summer creatures which winter has surprised and spared—cupids from Herculaneum, still surviving well into the thirteenth century, and winging their last slow flight, weary but never failing in the grace that might be expected of them, over the whole front of the porch.

As for this pleasure which by accomplishing my desire would have set me free from these meditations and which I should have sought quite as readily from any other pretty woman, had I been asked upon what—in the course of this endless flow of talk throughout which I took care to keep from Albertine the one thing that was in my mind—was based my optimistic hypothesis with regard to her possible complaisances, I should perhaps have answered that this hypothesis was due (while the forgotten outlines of Albertine's voice retraced for me the contour of her personality) to the apparition of certain words which did not form part of her vocabulary, or at least not in the acceptation which she now gave them. Thus she said to me that Elstir was stupid, and, on my protesting:

"You don't understand," she replied, smiling, "I mean that it was stupid of him to behave like that; of course I know he's quite a distinguished person, really."

Similarly, wishing to say of the Fontainebleau golf club that it was smart, she declared: "They are quite a selection."

Speaking of a duel that I had fought, she said of my seconds: "What very choice seconds," and looking at my face confessed that she would like to see me 'wear a moustache.' She even went so far (and my chances appeared then enormous) as to announce, in a phrase of which I would have sworn that she was ignorant a year earlier, that since she had last seen Gisèle there had passed a certain 'lapse of time.' This was not to say that Albertine had not already possessed, when I was at Balbec, a quite adequate assortment of those expressions which reveal at once that one's people are in easy circumstances, and which, year by year, a mother passes on to her daughter just as she bestows on her, gradually, as the girl grows up, on important occasions, her own jewels. It was evident that Albertine had ceased to be a little girl when one day, to express her thanks for a present which a strange lady had given her, she had said: "I am quite confused." Mme. Bontemps could not help looking across at her husband, whose comment was:

"Gad, she's old for fourteen."

The approach of nubility had been more strongly marked still when Albertine, speaking of another girl whose tone was bad, said: "One can't even tell whether she's pretty, she paints her face a foot thick." Finally, though still a schoolgirl, she already displayed the manner of a grown woman of her upbringing and station when she said, of some one whose face twitched: "I can't look at him, because it makes me want to do the same," or, if some one else were being imitated: "The absurd thing about it is that when you imitate her voice you look exactly like her." All these are drawn from the social treasury. But it did not seem to me possible that Albertine's natural environment could have supplied her with 'distinguished,' used in the sense in which my father would say of a colleague whom he had not actually met, but whose intellectual attainments he had heard praised: "It appears he's quite a distinguished person." 'Selection,' even when used of a golf club, seemed to me as incompatible with the Simonet family as it would be if preceded by the adjective 'Natural,' with a text published centuries before the researches of Darwin. 'Lapse of time' struck me as being of better augury still. Finally there appeared the evidence of certain upheavals, the nature of which was unknown to me, but sufficient to justify me in all my hopes when Albertine announced, with the satisfaction of a person whose opinion is by no means to be despised:

"To my mind, that is the best thing that could possibly happen. I regard it as the best solution, the stylish way out."

This was so novel, so manifestly an alluvial deposit giving one to suspect such capricious wanderings over soil hitherto unknown to her, that on hearing the words 'to my mind' I drew Albertine towards me, and at 'I regard' made her sit on the side of my bed.

No doubt it does happen that women of moderate culture, on marrying well-read men, receive such expressions as part of their paraphernalia. And shortly after the metamorphosis which follows the wedding night, when they begin to pay calls, and talk shyly to the friends of their girlhood, one notices with surprise that they have turned into matrons if, in deciding that some person is intelligent, they sound both l's in the word; but that is precisely the sign of a change of state, and I could see a difference when

I thought of the vocabulary of the Albertine I had known of old—a vocabulary in which the most daring flights were to say of any unusual person: 'He's a type,' or, if you suggested a game of cards to her: 'I've no money to lose,' or again, if any of her friends were to reproach her, in terms which she felt to be undeserved: 'That really is magnificent!' an expression dictated in such cases by a sort of middle-class tradition almost as old as the *Magnificat* itself, and one which a girl slightly out of temper and confident that she is in the right employs, as the saying is, 'quite naturally,' that is to say because she has learned the words from her mother, just as she has learned to say her prayers or to greet a friend. All these expressions Mme. Bontemps had imparted to her at the same time as her hatred of the Jews and her feeling for black, which was always suitable and becoming, indeed without any formal instruction, but as the piping of the parent goldfinches serves as a model for that of the young ones, recently hatched, so that they in turn grow into true goldfinches also. But when all was said, 'selection' appeared to me of alien growth and 'I regard' encouraging. Albertine was no longer the same; which meant that she would not perhaps act, would not react in the same way.

Not only did I no longer feel any love for her, but I had no longer to consider, as I should have had at Balbec, the risk of shattering in her an affection for myself, which no longer existed. There could be no doubt that she had long since become quite indifferent to me. I was well aware that to her I was in no sense a member now of the 'little band' into which I had at one time so anxiously sought and had then been so happy to have secured admission. Besides, as she had no longer even, as in Balbec days, an air of frank good nature, I felt no serious scruples: still I believe that what made me finally decide was another philological discovery. As, continuing to add fresh links to the external chain of talk behind which I hid my intimate desire, I spoke, having Albertine secure now on the corner of my bed, of one of the girls of the little band, one smaller than the rest, whom, nevertheless, I had thought quite pretty, "Yes," answered Albertine, "she reminds me of a little *mousmé*." There had been nothing in the world to shew, when I first knew Albertine, that she had ever heard the word *mousmé*. It was probable that, had things followed their normal course, she would never have learned it, and for my part I should have seen no cause for regret in that, for there is no more horrible word in the language. The mere sound of it makes one's teeth ache as they do when one has put too large a spoonful of ice in one's mouth. But coming from Albertine, as she sat there looking so pretty, not even '*mousmé*' could strike me as unpleasant. On the contrary, I felt it to be a revelation, if not of an outward initiation, at any rate of an inward evolution. Unfortunately it was now time for me to bid her good-bye if I wished her to reach home in time for her dinner, and myself to be out of bed and dressed in time for my own. It was Françoise who was getting it ready; she did not like having to keep it back, and must already have found it an infringement of one of the articles of her code that Albertine, in the absence of my parents, should be paying me so prolonged a visit, and one which was going to make everything late.

But before '*mousmé*' all these arguments fell to the ground and I hastened to say:

"Just fancy; I'm not in the least ticklish; you can go on tickling me for an hour on end and I won't even feel it."

"Really?"

"I assure you."

She understood, doubtless, that this was the awkward expression of a desire on my part, for, like a person who offers to give you an introduction for which you have not ventured to ask him, though what you have said has shewn him that it would be of great service to you.

"Would you like me to try?" she inquired, with womanly meekness.

"Just as you like, but you would be more comfortable if you lay down properly on the bed."

"Like that?"

"No; get right on top."

"You're sure I'm not too heavy?"

As she uttered these words the door opened and Françoise, carrying a lamp, came in. Albertine had just time to fling herself back upon her chair. Perhaps Françoise had chosen this moment to confound us, having been listening at the door or even peeping through the keyhole. But there was no need to suppose anything of the sort; she might have scorned to assure herself, by the use of her eyes, of what her instinct must plainly enough have detected, for by dint of living with me and my parents her fears, her prudence, her alertness, her cunning had ended by giving her that instinctive and almost prophetic knowledge of us all that the mariner has of the sea, the quarry of the hunter, and, of the malady, if not the physician, often at any rate the patient. The amount of knowledge that she managed to acquire would have astounded a stranger, and with as good reason as does the advanced state of certain arts and sciences among the ancients, seeing that there was practically no source of information open to them. (Her sources were no larger. They were a few casual remarks forming barely a twentieth part of our conversation at dinner, caught on the wing by the butler and inaccurately transmitted to the kitchen.) Again, her mistakes were due, like theirs, like the fables in which Plato believed, rather to a false conception of the world and to preconceived ideas than to the insufficiency of the materials at her disposal. Only the other day, has it not been possible for the most important discoveries as to the habits of insects to be made by a scientist who had access to no laboratory and used no instruments of any sort? But if the drawbacks arising from her menial position had not prevented her from acquiring a stock of learning indispensable to the art which was its ultimate goal—and which consisted in putting us to confusion by communicating to us the results of her discoveries—the limitations under which she worked had done more; in this case the impediment, not content with merely not paralysing the flight of her imagination, had greatly strengthened it. Of course Françoise never let slip any artificial device, those for example of diction and attitude. Since (if she never believed what we said to her, hoping that she would believe it) she admitted without any shadow of doubt the truth of anything that any person of her own condition in life might tell her, however absurd, which might at the same time prove shocking to our ideas, just as her way of listening to our assertions bore witness to her incredulity, so the accents in which she reported (the use of indirect speech enabling her to hurl the most deadly insults at us with impunity) the narrative of a cook who had told her how she had threatened her employers, and won from them, by treating them before all the world like dirt, any number of privileges and concessions, shewed that the story was to her as gospel. Françoise went so far as to add: "I'm sure, if I had been the mistress I should have been quite vexed." In vain might we, despite our scant sympathy at first with the lady on the fourth floor, shrug our shoulders, as though at an unlikely fable, at this report of so shocking an example; in making it the teller was able to speak with the crushing, the lacerating force of the most unquestionable, most irritating affirmation.

But above all, just as great writers often attain to a power of concentration from which they would have been dispensed under a system of political liberty or literary anarchy, when they are bound by the tyranny of a monarch or of a school of poetry, by the severity of prosodic laws or of a state religion, so Françoise, not being able to reply to us in an explicit fashion, spoke like Tiresias and would have written like Tacitus. She managed to embody everything that she could not express directly in a sentence for which we could not find fault with her without accusing ourselves, indeed in less than a sentence, in a silence, in the way in which she placed a thing in a room.

Thus when I happened to leave, by accident, on my table, among a pile of other letters, one which it was imperative that she should not see, because, let us say, it referred to her with a dislike which afforded a presumption of the same feeling towards her in the recipient as in the writer, that evening, if I came home with a troubled conscience and went straight to my room, there on top of my letters, neatly arranged in a symmetrical pile, the compromising document caught my eye as it could not possibly have failed to catch the eye of Françoise, placed by her right at the top, almost separated from the rest, in a prominence that was a form of speech, that had an eloquence all its own, and, as I stood in the doorway, made me shudder like a cry. She excelled in the preparation of these scenic effects, intended so to enlighten the spectator, in her absence, that he already knew that she knew everything when in due course she made her appearance. She possessed, for thus making an inanimate object speak, the art, at once inspired and painstaking, of Irving or Frédéric Lemaître. On this occasion, holding over Albertine and myself the lighted lamp whose searching beams missed none of the still visible depressions which the girl's body had hollowed in the counterpane, Françoise made one think of a picture of 'Justice throwing light upon Crime.' Albertine's face did not suffer by this illumination. It revealed on her cheeks the same sunny burnish that had charmed me at Balbec. This face of Albertine, the general effect of which sometimes was, out of doors, a sort of milky pallor, now shewed, according as the lamp shone on them, surfaces so dazzlingly, so uniformly coloured, so firm, so glowing that one might have compared them to the sustained flesh tints of certain flowers. Taken aback meanwhile by the unexpected entry of Françoise, I exclaimed:

"What? The lamp already? I say, the light is strong!"

My object, as may be imagined, was by the second of these ejaculations to account for my confusion, by the first to excuse my lateness in rising. Françoise replied with a cruel ambiguity:

"Do you want me to extinglish it?"

"—guish!" Albertine slipped into my ear, leaving me charmed by the familiar vivacity with which, taking me at once for teacher and for accomplice, she insinuated this psychological affirmation as though asking a grammatical question.

When Françoise had left the room and Albertine was seated once again on my bed:

"Do you know what I'm afraid of?" I asked her. "It is that if we go on like this I may not be able to resist the temptation to kiss you."

"That would be a fine pity."

I did not respond at once to this invitation, which another man might even have found superfluous, for Albertine's way of pronouncing her words was so carnal, so seductive that merely in speaking to you she seemed to be caressing you. A word from her was a favour, and her conversation covered you with kisses. And yet it was highly attractive to me, this invitation. It would have been so, indeed, coming from any pretty girl of Albertine's age; but that Albertine should be now so accessible to me gave me more than pleasure, brought before my eyes a series of images that bore the stamp of beauty. I recalled the original Albertine standing between me and the beach, almost painted upon a background of sea, having for me no more real existence than those figures seen on the stage, when one knows not whether one is looking at the actress herself who is supposed to appear, at an understudy who for the moment is taking her principal's part, or at a mere projection from a lantern. Then the real woman had detached herself from the luminous mass, had come towards me, with the sole result that I had been able to see that she had nothing in real life of that amorous facility which one supposed to be stamped upon her in the magic pictures. I had learned that it was not possible to touch her, to embrace her, that one might only talk to her, that for me she was no more a woman than the jade grapes, an inedible decoration at one time in fashion on dinner tables, are really fruit. And now she was appearing to me in a third plane, real as in the second experience that I had had of her but facile as in the first; facile, and all the more deliciously so in that I had so long imagined that she was not. My surplus knowledge of life (of a life less uniform, less simple than I had at first supposed it to be) inclined me provisionally towards agnosticism. What can one positively affirm, when the thing that one thought probable at first has then shewn itself to be false and in the third instance turns out true? And alas, I was not yet at the end of my discoveries with regard to Albertine. In any case, even if there had not been the romantic attraction of this disclosure of a greater wealth of planes revealed one after another by life (an attraction the opposite of that which Saint-Loup had felt during our dinners at Rivebelle on recognising beneath the mask with which the course of existence had overlaid them, in a calm face, features to which his lips had once been pressed), the knowledge that to kiss Albertine's cheeks was a possible thing was a pleasure perhaps greater even than that of kissing them. What a difference between possessing a woman to whom one applies one's body alone, because she is no more than a piece of flesh, and possessing the girl whom one used to see on the beach with her friends on certain days without even knowing why one saw her on those days and not on others, which made one tremble to think that one might not see her again. Life had obligingly revealed to one in its whole extent the romance of this little girl, had lent one, for the study of her, first one optical instrument, then another, and had added to one's carnal desire an accompaniment which multiplied it an hundredfold and diversified it with those other desires, more spiritual and less easily assuaged, which do not emerge from their torpor, leaving carnal desire to move by itself, when it aims only at the conquest of a piece of flesh, but which to gain possession of a whole tract of memories, whence they have felt the wretchedness of exile, rise in a tempest round about it, enlarge, extend it, are unable to follow it to the accomplishment, the assimilation, impossible in the form in which it is looked for, of an immaterial reality, but wait for this desire halfway and at the moment of recollection, of return furnish it afresh with their escort; to kiss, instead of the cheeks of the first comer, however cool and fresh they might be, but anonymous, with no secret, with no distinction, those of which I had so long been dreaming, would be to know the taste, the savour of a colour on which I had endlessly gazed. One has seen a woman, a mere image in the decorative setting of life, like Albertine, outlined against the sea, and then one has been able to take that image, to detach it, to bring it close to oneself, gradually to discern its solidity, its colours, as though one had placed it behind the glasses of a stereoscope. It is for this reason that the women who are a little difficult, whose resistance one does not at once overcome, of whom one does not indeed know at first whether one ever will overcome it, are alone interesting. For to know them, to approach them, to conquer them is to make fluctuate in form, in dimensions, in relief the human image, is an example of relativity in the appreciation of an image which it is delightful to see afresh when it has resumed the slender proportions of a silhouette in the setting of one's life. The women one meets first of all in a brothel are of no interest because they remain invariable.

In addition, Albertine preserved, inseparably attached to her, all my impressions of a series of seascapes of which I was particularly fond. I felt that it was possible for me, on the girl's two cheeks, to kiss the whole of the beach at Balbec.

"If you really don't mind my kissing you, I would rather put it off for a little and choose a good moment. Only you mustn't forget that you've said I may. I shall want a voucher: 'Valid for one kiss.' "

"Shall I have to sign it?"

"But if I took it now, should I be entitled to another later on?"

"You do make me laugh with your vouchers; I shall issue a new one every now and then."

"Tell me; just one thing more. You know, at Balbec, before I had been introduced to you, you used often to have a hard, calculating look; you can't tell me what you were thinking about when you looked like that?"

"No; I don't remember at all."

"Wait; this may remind you: one day your friend Gisèle put her feet together and jumped over the chair an old gentleman was sitting in. Try to remember what was in your mind at that moment."

"Gisèle was the one we saw least of; she did belong to the band, I suppose, but not properly. I expect I thought that she was very ill-bred and common."

"Oh, is that all?"

I should certainly have liked, before kissing her, to be able to fill her afresh with the mystery which she had had for me on the beach before I knew her, to find latent in her the place in which she had lived earlier still; for that, at any rate, if I knew nothing of it, I could substitute all my memories of our life at Balbec, the sound of the waves rolling up and breaking beneath my window, the shouts of the children. But when I let my eyes glide over the charming pink globe of her cheeks, the gently curving surfaces of which ran up to expire beneath the first foothills of her piled black tresses which ran in undulating mountain chains, thrust out escarped ramparts and moulded the hollows of deep valleys, I could not help saying to myself: "Now at last, after failing at Balbec, I am going to learn the fragrance of the secret rose that blooms in Albertine's cheeks, and, since the cycles through which we are able to make things and people pass in the course of our existence are comparatively few, perhaps I ought now to regard mine as nearing its end when, having made to emerge from its remoteness the flowering face that I had chosen from among all others, I shall have brought it into this new plane in which I shall at last acquire a tactual experience of it with my lips." I told myself this because I believed that there was such a thing as knowledge acquired by the lips; I told myself that I was going to know the taste of this fleshly rose, because I had never stopped to think that man, a creature obviously less rudimentary in structure than the sea-urchin or even the whale, is nevertheless still unprovided with a certain number of essential organs, and notably possesses none that will serve for kissing. The place of this absent organ he supplies with his lips, and thereby arrives perhaps at a slightly more satisfying result than if he were reduced to caressing the beloved with a horny tusk. But a pair of lips, designed to convey to the palate the taste of whatever whets the appetite, must be content, without ever realising their mistake or admitting their disappointment, with roaming over the surface and with coming to a halt at the barrier of the impenetrable but irresistible cheek. Besides, at such moments, at the actual contact between flesh and flesh, the lips, even supposing them to become more expert and better endowed, could taste no better probably the savour which nature prevents their ever actually grasping, for in that desolate zone in which they are unable to find their proper nourishment, they are alone; the sense of sight, then that of smell have long since deserted them. To begin with, as my mouth began gradually to approach the cheeks which my eyes had suggested to it that it should kiss, my eyes, changing their position, saw a different pair of cheeks; the throat, studied at closer range and as though through a magnifying glass shewed in its coarse grain a robustness which modified the character of the face.

Apart from the most recent applications of the art of photography—which set crouching at the foot of a cathedral all the houses which, time and again, when we stood near them, have appeared to us to reach almost to the height of the towers, drill and deploy like a regiment, in file, in open order, in mass, the same famous and familiar structures, bring into actual contact the two columns on the Piazzetta which a moment ago were so far apart, thrust away the adjoining dome of the Salute, and in a pale and toneless background manage to include a whole immense horizon within the span of a bridge, in the embrasure of a window, among the leaves of a tree that stands in the foreground and is portrayed in a more vigorous tone, give successively as setting to the same church the arched walls of all the others—I can think of nothing that can so effectively as a kiss evoke from what we believe to be a thing with one definite aspect, the hundred other things which it may equally well be since each is related to a view of it no less legitimate. In short, just as at Balbec Albertine had often appeared to me different, so now, as if, wildly accelerating the speed of the changes of aspect and changes of colouring which a person presents to us in the course of our various encounters, I had sought to contain them all in the space of a few seconds so as to reproduce experimentally the phenomenon which diversifies the individuality of a fellow creature, and to draw out one from another, like a nest of boxes, all the possibilities that it contains, in this brief passage of my lips towards her cheek it was ten Albertines that I saw; this single girl being like a goddess with several heads, that which I had last seen, if I tried to approach it, gave place to another. At least so long as I had not touched it, that head, I could still see it, a faint perfume reached me from it. But alas—for in this matter of kissing our nostrils and eyes are as ill placed as our lips are shaped—suddenly my eyes ceased to see; next, my nose, crushed by the collision, no longer perceived any fragrance, and, without thereby gaining any clearer idea of the taste of the rose of my desire, I learned, from these unpleasant signs, that at last I was in the act of kissing Albertine's cheek.

Was it because we were enacting—as may be illustrated by the rotation of a solid body—the converse of our scene together at Balbec, because it was I, now, who was lying in bed and she who sat beside me, capable of evading any brutal attack and of dictating her pleasure to me, that she allowed me to take so easily now what she had refused me on the former occasion with so forbidding a frown? (No doubt from that same frown the voluptuous expression which her face assumed now at the approach of my lips differed only by a deviation of its lines immeasurably minute but one in which may be contained all the disparity that there is between the gesture of 'finishing off' a wounded man and that of bringing him relief, between a sublime and a hideous portrait.) Not knowing whether I had to give the credit, and to feel grateful for this change of attitude to some unwitting benefactor who in these last months, in Paris or at Balbec, had been working on my behalf, I supposed that the respective positions in which we were now placed might account for it. It was quite another explanation, however, that Albertine offered me; this, in short: "Oh, well, you see, that time at Balbec I didn't know you properly. For all I knew, you might have meant mischief." This argument left me in perplexity. Albertine was no doubt sincere in advancing it. So difficult is it for a woman to recognise in the movements of her limbs, in the sensations felt by her body in the course of an intimate conversation with a friend, the unknown sin into which she would tremble to think that a stranger was planning her fall.

In any case, whatever the modifications that had occurred at some recent time in her life, which might perhaps have explained why it was that she now readily accorded to my momentary and purely physical desire what at Balbec she had with horror refused to allow to my love, another far more surprising manifested itself in Albertine that same evening as soon as her caresses had procured in me the satisfaction which she could not have failed to notice, which, indeed, I had been afraid might provoke in her the instinctive movement of revulsion and offended modesty which Gilberte had given at a corresponding moment behind the laurel shrubbery in the Champs-Elysées.

The exact opposite happened. Already, when I had first made her lie on my bed and had begun to fondle her, Albertine had assumed an air which I did not remember in her, of docile good will, of an almost childish simplicity. Obliterating every trace of her customary anxieties and interests, the moment preceding pleasure, similar in this respect to the moment after death, had restored to her rejuvenated features what seemed like the innocence of earliest childhood. And no doubt everyone whose special talent is suddenly brought into play becomes modest, devoted, charming; especially if by this talent he knows that he is giving us a great pleasure, he is himself happy in the display of it, anxious to present it to us in as complete a form as possible. But in this new expression on Albertine's face there was more than a mere profession of disinterestedness, conscience, generosity, a sort of conventional and unexpected devotion; and it was farther than to her own childhood, it was to the infancy of the race that she had reverted. Very different from myself who had looked for nothing more than a physical alleviation, which I had finally secured, Albertine seemed to feel that it would indicate a certain coarseness on her part were she to seem to believe that this material pleasure could be unaccompanied by a moral sentiment or was to be regarded as terminating anything. She, who had been in so great a hurry a moment ago, now, presumably because she felt that kisses implied love and that love took precedence of all other duties, said when I reminded her of her dinner:

"Oh, but that doesn't matter in the least; I have plenty of time."

She seemed embarrassed by the idea of getting up and going immediately after what had happened, embarrassed by good manners, just as Françoise when, without feeling thirsty, she had felt herself bound to accept with a seemly gaiety the glass of wine which Jupien offered her, would never have dared to leave him as soon as the last drops were drained, however urgent the call of duty. Albertine—and this was perhaps, with another which the reader will learn in due course, one of the reasons which had made me unconsciously desire her—was one of the incarnations of the little French peasant whose type may be seen in stone at Saint-André-des-Champs. As in Françoise, who presently nevertheless was to become her deadly enemy, I recognised in her a courtesy towards friend and stranger, a sense of decency, of respect for the bedside.

Françoise who, after the death of my aunt, felt obliged to speak only in a plaintive tone, would, in the months that preceded her daughter's marriage, have been quite shocked if, when the young couple walked out together, the girl had not taken her lover's arm. Albertine lying motionless beside me said:

"What nice hair you have; what nice eyes; you are a dear boy."

When, after pointing out to her that it was getting late, I added: "You don't believe me?" she replied, what was perhaps true but could be so only since the minute before and for the next few hours:

"I always believe you."

She spoke to me of myself, my family, my social position. She said: "Oh, I know your parents know some very nice people. You are a friend of Robert Forestier and Suzanne Delage." For the moment these names conveyed absolutely nothing to me. But suddenly I remembered that I had indeed played as a child in the Champs-Elysées with Robert Forestier, whom I had never seen since then. As for Suzanne Delage, she was the great-niece of Mme. Blatin, and I had once been going to a dancing lesson, and had even promised to take a small part in a play that was being acted in her mother's drawing-room. But the fear of being sent into fits of laughter, and of a bleeding nose, had made me decline, so that I had never set eyes on her. I had at the most a vague idea that I had once heard that the Swanns' governess with the feather in her hat had at one time been with the Delages, but perhaps it was only a sister of this governess, or a friend. I protested to Albertine that Robert Forestier and Suzanne Delage occupied a very small place in my life. "That may be; but your mothers are friends, I can place you by that. I often pass Suzanne Delage in the Avenue de Messine, I admire her style." Our mothers were acquainted only in the imagination of Mme. Bontemps, who having heard that I had at one time played with Robert Forestier, to whom, it appeared, I used to recite poetry, had concluded from that that we were bound by family ties. She could never, I gathered, hear my mother's name mentioned without observing: "Oh, yes, she is in the Delage Forestier set," giving my parents a good mark which they had done nothing to deserve.

Apart from this, Albertine's social ideas were fatuous in the extreme. She regarded the Simonnets with a double 'n' as inferior not only to the Simonets with a single 'n' but to everyone in the world. That some one else should bear the same name as yourself without belonging to your family is an excellent reason for despising him. Of course there are exceptions. It may happen that two Simonnets (introduced to one another at one of those gatherings where one feels the need to converse, no matter on what subject, and where moreover one is instinctively well disposed towards strangers, for instance in a funeral procession on its way to the cemetery), finding that they have the same name, will seek with a mutual friendliness though without success to discover a possible connexion. But that is only an exception. Plenty of people are of dubious character, but we either know nothing or care nothing about them. If, however, a similarity of names brings to our door letters addressed to them, or vice versa, we at once feel a mistrust, often justified, as to their moral worth. We are afraid of being confused with them, we forestall the mistake by a grimace of disgust when anyone refers to them in our hearing. When we read our own name, as borne by them, in the newspaper, they seem to have usurped it. The transgressions of other members of the social organism leave us cold. We lay the burden of them more heavily upon our namesakes. The hatred which we bear towards the other Simonnets is all the stronger in that it is not a personal feeling but has been transmitted by heredity. After the second generation we remember only the expression of disgust with which our grandparents used to refer to the other Simonnets, we know nothing of the reason, we should not be surprised to learn that it had begun with a murder. Until, as is not uncommon, the time comes when a male and female Simonnet, who are not related in any way, are joined together in matrimony and so repair the breach.

Not only did Albertine speak to me of Robert Forestier and Suzanne Delage, but spontaneously, with that impulse to confide which the approximation of two human bodies creates, that is to say at first, before it has engendered a special duplicity and reticence in one person towards the other, she told me a story about her own family and one of Andrée's uncles, as to which, at Balbec, she had refused to utter a word; thinking that now she ought not to appear to have any secrets in which I might not share. From this moment, had her dearest friend said anything to her against me, she would have made it her duty to inform me. I insisted upon her going home, and finally she did go, but so ashamed on my account at my discourtesy that she laughed almost as though to apologise for me, as a hostess to whose party you have gone without dressing makes the best of you but is offended nevertheless.

"Are you laughing at me?" I inquired.

"I am not laughing, I am smiling at you," she replied lovingly. "When am I going to see you again?" she went on, as though declining to admit that what had just happened between us, since it is generally the crowning consummation, might not be at least the prelude to a great friendship, a friendship already existing which we should have to discover, to confess, and which alone could account for the surrender we had made of ourselves.

"Since you give me leave, I shall send for you when I can." I dared not let her know that I was subordinating everything else to the chance of seeing Mme. de Stermaria. "It will have to be at short notice, unfortunately," I went on, "I never know beforehand. Would it be possible for me to send round for you in the evenings, when I am free?"

"It will be quite possible in a little while, I am going to have a latch-key of my own. But just at present it can't be done. Anyhow I shall come round to-morrow or next day in the afternoon. You needn't see me if you're busy."

On reaching the door, surprised that I had not anticipated her, she offered me her cheek, feeling that there was no need now for any coarse physical desire to prompt us to kiss one another. The brief relations in which we had just indulged being of the sort to which an absolute intimacy and a heartfelt choice often tend, Albertine had felt it incumbent upon her to improvise and add provisionally to the kisses which we had exchanged on my bed the sentiment of which those kisses would have been the symbol for a knight and his lady such as they might have been conceived in the mind of a gothic minstrel.

When she had left me, this young Picard, who might have been carved on his porch by the image-maker of Saint-André-des-Champs, Françoise brought me a letter which filled me with joy, for it was from Mme. de Stermaria, who accepted my invitation to dinner. From Mme. de Stermaria, that was to say for me not so much from the real Mme. de Stermaria as from her of whom I had been thinking all day before Albertine's arrival. It is the terrible deception of love that it begins by engaging us in play not with a woman of the external world but with a puppet fashioned and kept in our brain, the only form of her moreover that we have always at our disposal, the only one that we shall ever possess, one which the arbitrary power of memory, almost as absolute as that of imagination, may have made as different from the real woman as had been from the real Balbec the Balbec of my dreams; an artificial creation to which by degrees, and to our own hurt, we shall force the real woman into resemblance.

Albertine had made me so late that the play had just finished when I entered Mme. de Villeparisis's drawing-room; and having little desire to be caught in the stream of guests who were pouring out, discussing the great piece of news, the separation, said to be already effected, of the Duc de Guermantes from his wife, I had, until I should have an opportunity of shaking hands with my hostess, taken my seat on an empty sofa in the outer room, when from the other, in which she had no doubt had her chair in the very front row of all, I saw emerging, majestic, ample and tall in a flowing gown of yellow satin upon which stood out in relief huge black poppies, the Duchess herself. The sight of her no longer disturbed me in the least. There had been a day when, laying her hands on my forehead (as was her habit when she was afraid of hurting my feelings) and saying: "You really must stop hanging about trying to meet Mme. de Guermantes. All the neighbours are talking about you. Besides, look how ill your grandmother is, you really have something more serious to think about than waylaying a woman who only laughs at you," in a moment, like a hypnotist who brings one back from the distant country in which one imagined oneself to be, and opens one's eyes for one, or like the doctor who, by recalling one to a sense of duty and reality, cures one of an imaginary disease in which one has been indulging one's fancy, my mother had awakened me from an unduly protracted dream. The rest of the day had been consecrated to a last farewell to this malady which I was renouncing; I had sung, for hours on end and weeping as I sang, the sad words of Schubert's *Adieu*:

Farewell, strange voices call thee
Away from me, dear sister of the angels.

And then it had finished. I had given up my morning walks, and with so little difficulty that I thought myself justified in the prophecy (which we shall see was to prove false later on) that I should easily grow accustomed in the course of my life to ceasing to see a woman. And when, shortly afterwards, Françoise had reported to me that Jupien, anxious to enlarge his business, was looking for a shop in the neighbourhood, wishing to find one for him (quite happy, moreover, when strolling along a street which already from my bed I had heard luminously vociferous like a peopled beach, to see behind the raised iron shutters of the dairies the young milk-girls with their white sleeves), I had been able to begin these excursions again. Nor did I feel the slightest constraint; for I was conscious that I was no longer going out with the object of seeing Mme. de Guermantes; much as a married woman who takes endless precautions so long as she has a lover, from the day on which she has broken with him leaves his letters lying about, at the risk of disclosing to her husband an infidelity which ceased to alarm her the moment she ceased to be guilty of it. What troubled me now was the discovery that almost every house sheltered some unhappy person. In one the wife was always in tears because her husband was unfaithful to her. In the next it was the other way about. In another a hardworking mother, beaten black and blue by a drunkard son, was endeavouring to conceal her sufferings from the eyes of the neighbours. Quite half of the human race was in tears. And when I came to know the people who composed it I saw that they were so exasperating that I asked myself whether it might not be the adulterous husband and wife (who were so simply because their lawful happiness had been withheld from them, and shewed themselves charming and faithful to everyone but their respective wife and husband) who were in the right. Presently I ceased to have even the excuse of being useful to Jupien for continuing my morning wanderings. For we learned that the cabinet-maker in our courtyard, whose workrooms were separated from Jupien's shop only by the flimsiest of partitions, was shortly to be 'given notice' by the Duke's agent because his hammering made too much noise. Jupien could have hoped for nothing better; the workrooms had a basement for storing timber, which communicated with our cellars. He could keep his coal in this, he could knock down the partition, and would then have a huge shop all in one room. But even without the amusement of house-hunting on his behalf I had continued to go out every day before luncheon, just as Jupien himself, finding the rent that M. de Guermantes was asking him exorbitant, was allowing the premises to be inspected in the hope that, discouraged by his failure to find a tenant, the Duke would resign himself to accepting a lower offer. Françoise, noticing that, even at an hour when no prospective tenant was likely to call, the porter left the door of the empty shop on the latch, scented a trap laid by him to entice the young woman who was engaged to the Guermantes footman (they would find a lovers' retreat there) and to catch them red-handed.

However that might be, and for all that I had no longer to find Jupien a new shop, I still went out before luncheon. Often, on these excursions, I met M. de Norpois. It would happen that, conversing as he walked with a colleague, he cast at me a glance which after making a thorough scrutiny of my person returned to his companion without his having smiled at me or given me any more sign of recognition than if he had never set eyes on me before. For, with these eminent diplomats, looking at you in a certain way is intended to let you know not that they have seen you but that they have not seen you and that they have some serious question to discuss with the colleague who is accompanying them. A tall woman whom I frequently encountered near the house was less discreet with me. For in spite of the fact that I did not know her, she would turn round to look at me, would wait for me, unavailingly, before shop windows, smile at me as though she were going to kiss me, make gestures indicative of a complete surrender. She resumed an icy coldness towards me if anyone appeared whom she knew. For a long time now in these morning walks, thinking only of what I had to do, were it but the most trivial purchase of a newspaper, I had chosen the shortest way, with no regret were it outside the ordinary course which the Duchess followed in her walks, and if on the other hand it lay along that course, without either compunction or concealment, because it no longer appeared to me the forbidden way on which I should snatch from an ungrateful woman the favour of setting eyes on her against her will. But it had never occurred to me that my recovery, when it restored me to a normal attitude towards Mme. de Guermantes, would have a corresponding effect on her, and so render possible a friendliness, even a friendship in which I no longer felt any interest. Until then, the efforts of the entire world banded together to bring me into touch with her would have been powerless to counteract the evil spell that is cast by an ill-starred love. Fairies more powerful than mankind have decreed that in such cases nothing can avail us until the day on which we have uttered sincerely and from our hearts the formula: "I am no longer in love." I had been vexed with Saint-Loup for not having taken me to see his aunt. But he was no more capable than anyone else of breaking an enchantment. So long as I was in love with Mme. de Guermantes, the marks of politeness that I received from others, their compliments actually distressed me, not only because they did not come from her but because she would never hear of them. And yet even if she had known of them it would not have been of the slightest use to me. Indeed, among the lesser auxiliaries to success in love, an absence, the declining of an invitation to dinner, an unintentional, unconscious harshness are of more service than all the cosmetics and fine clothes in the world. There would be plenty of social success, were people taught upon these lines the art of succeeding.

As she swept through the room in which I was sitting, her mind filled with thoughts of friends whom I did not know and whom she would perhaps be meeting presently at some other party, Mme. de Guermantes caught sight of me on my sofa, genuinely indifferent and seeking only to be polite whereas while I was in love I had tried so desperately, without ever succeeding, to assume an air of indifference; she swerved aside, came towards me and, reproducing the smile she had worn that evening at the Opéra-Comique, which the unpleasant feeling of being cared for by some one for whom she did not care was no longer there to obliterate: "No, don't move; you don't mind if I sit down beside you for a moment?" she asked, gracefully gathering in her immense skirt which otherwise would have covered the entire sofa.

Of less stature than she, who was further expanded by the volume of her gown, I was almost brushed by her exquisite bare arm round which a faint, innumerable down rose in perpetual smoke like a golden mist, and by the fringe of her fair tresses which wafted their fragrance over me. Having barely room to sit down, she could not turn easily to face me, and so, obliged to look straight before her rather than in my direction, assumed the sort of dreamy, sweet expression one sees in a portrait.

"Have you any news of Robert?" she inquired.

At that moment Mme. de Villeparisis entered the room.

"Well, Sir, you arrive at a fine time, when we do see you here for once in a way!" And noticing that I was talking to her niece, concluding, perhaps, that we were more intimate than she had supposed: "But don't let me interrupt your conversation with Oriane," she went on, and (for these good offices as pander are part of the duties of the perfect hostess): "You wouldn't care to dine with her here on Thursday?"

It was the day on which I was to entertain Mme. de Stermaria, so I declined.

"Saturday, then?"

As my mother was returning on Saturday or Sunday, it would never do for me not to stay at home every evening to dine with her; I therefore declined this invitation also.

"Ah, you're not an easy person to get hold of."

"Why do you never come to see me?" inquired Mme. de Guermantes when Mme. de Villeparisis had left us to go and congratulate the performers and present the leading lady with a bunch of roses upon which the hand that offered it conferred all its value, for it had cost no more than twenty francs. (This, incidentally, was as high as she ever went when an artist had performed only once. Those who gave their services at all her afternoons and evenings throughout the season received roses painted by the Marquise.)

"It's such a bore that we never see each other except in other people's houses. Since you won't meet me at dinner at my aunt's, why not come and dine with me?" Various people who had stayed to the last possible moment, upon one pretext or another, but were at length preparing to leave, seeing that the Duchess had sat down to talk to a young man on a seat so narrow as just to contain them both, thought that they must have been misinformed, that it was the Duchess, and not the Duke, who was seeking a separation, and on my account. Whereupon they hastened to spread abroad this intelligence. I had better grounds than anyone to be aware of its falsehood. But I was myself surprised that at one of those difficult periods in which a separation that is not yet completed is beginning to take effect, the Duchess, instead of withdrawing from society should go out of her way to invite a person whom she knew so slightly. The suspicion crossed my mind that it had been the Duke alone who had been opposed to her having me in the house, and that now that he was leaving her she saw no further obstacle to her surrounding herself with the people that she liked.

A minute earlier I should have been stupefied had anyone told me that Mme. de Guermantes was going to ask me to call on her, let alone to dine with her. I might be perfectly aware that the Guermantes drawing-room could not furnish those particular refinements which I had extracted from the name of its occupants, the fact that it had been forbidden ground to me, by obliging me to give it the same kind of existence that we give to the drawing-rooms of which we have read the description in a novel, or seen the image in a dream, made me, even when I was certain that it was just like any other, imagine it as quite different. Between myself and it was the barrier at which reality ends. To dine with the Guermantes was like travelling to a place I had long wished to see, making a desire emerge from my brain and take shape before my eyes, forming acquaintance with a dream. At the most, I might have supposed that it would be one of those dinners to which one's hosts invite one with: "Do come; there'll be *absolutely* nobody but ourselves," pretending to attribute to the pariah the alarm which they themselves feel at the thought of his mixing with their other friends, seeking indeed to convert into an enviable privilege, reserved for their intimates alone, the quarantine of the outsider, hopelessly uncouth, whom they are befriending. I felt on the contrary that Mme. de Guermantes was anxious for me to enjoy the most delightful society that she had to offer me when she went on, projecting as she spoke before my eyes as it were the violet-hued loveliness of a visit to Fabrice's aunt with the miracle of an introduction to Count Mosca:

"On Friday, now, couldn't you? There are just a few people coming; the Princesse de Parme, who is charming, not that I'd ask you to meet anyone who wasn't nice."

Discarded in the intermediate social grades which are engaged in a perpetual upward movement, the family still plays an important part in certain stationary grades, such as the lower middle class and the semi-royal aristocracy, which latter cannot seek to raise itself since above it, from its own special point of view, there exists nothing higher. The friendship shewn me by her 'aunt Villeparisis' and Robert had perhaps made me, for Mme. de Guermantes and her friends, living always upon themselves and in the same little circle, the object of a curious interest of which I had no suspicion.

She had of those two relatives a familiar, everyday, homely knowledge, of a sort, utterly different from what we imagine, in which if we happen to be comprised in it, so far from our actions being at once ejected, like the grain of dust from the eye or the drop of water from the windpipe, they are capable of remaining engraved, and will still be related and discussed years after we ourselves have forgotten them, in the palace in which we are astonished to find them preserved, like a letter in our own handwriting among a priceless collection of autographs.

People who are merely fashionable may set a guard upon doors which are too freely invalided. But the Guermantes door was not that. Hardly ever did a stranger have occasion to pass by it. If, for once in a way, the Duchess had one pointed out to her, she never dreamed of troubling herself about the social increment that he would bring, since this was a thing that she conferred and could not receive. She thought only of his real merits. Both Mme. de Villeparisis and Saint-Loup had testified to mine. Doubtless she might not have believed them if she had not at the same time observed that they could never manage to secure me when they wanted me, and therefore that I attached no importance to worldly things, which seemed to the Duchess a sign that the stranger was to be numbered among what she called 'nice people.'

It was worth seeing, when one spoke to her of women for whom she did not care, how her face changed as soon as one named, in connexion with one of these, let us say, her sister-in-law. "Oh, she is charming!" the Duchess would exclaim in a judicious, confident tone. The only reason that she gave was that this lady had declined to be introduced to the Marquise de Chaussegros and the Princesse de Silistrie. She did not add that the lady had declined also an introduction to herself, the Duchesse de Guermantes. This had, nevertheless, been the case, and ever since the mind of the Duchess had been at work trying to unravel the motives of a woman who was so hard to know, she was dying to be invited to call on her. People in society are so accustomed to be sought after that the person who shuns them seems to them a phoenix and at once monopolises their attention.

Was the true motive in the mind of Mme. de Guermantes for thus inviting me (now that I was no longer in love with her) that I did not run after her relatives, although apparently run after myself by them? I cannot say. In any case, having made up her mind to invite me, she was anxious to do me the honours of the best company at her disposal and to keep away those of her friends whose presence might have dissuaded me from coming again, those whom she knew to be boring. I had not known to what to attribute her change of direction, when I had seen her deviate from her stellar path, come to sit down beside me and had heard her invite me to dinner, the effect of causes unknown for want of a special sense to enlighten us in this respect. We picture to ourselves the people who know us but slightly—such as, in my case, the Duchesse de Guermantes—as thinking of us only at the rare moments at which they set eyes on us. As a matter of fact this ideal oblivion in which we picture them as holding us is a purely arbitrary conception on our part. So that while, in our solitary silence, like that of a cloudless night, we imagine the various queens of society pursuing their course in the heavens at an infinite distance, we cannot help an involuntary start of dismay or pleasure if there falls upon us from that starry height, like a meteorite engraved with our name which we supposed to be unknown on Venus or Cassiopeia, an invitation to dinner or a piece of malicious gossip.

Perhaps now and then when, following the example of the Persian princes who, according to the Book of Esther, made their scribes read out to them the registers in which were enrolled the names of those of their subjects who had shewn zeal in their service, Mme. de Guermantes consulted her list of the well-disposed, she had said to herself, on coming to my name: "A man we must ask to dine some day." But other thoughts had distracted her

(Beset by surging cares, a Prince's mind
Towards fresh matters ever is inclined)

until the moment when she had caught sight of me sitting alone like Mordecai at the palace gate; and, the sight of me having refreshed her memory, sought, like Ahasuerus, to lavish her gifts upon me.

I must at the same time add that a surprise of a totally different sort was to follow that which I had felt on hearing Mme. de Guermantes ask me to dine with her. Since I had decided that it would shew greater modesty, on my part, and gratitude also not to conceal this initial surprise, but rather to exaggerate my expression of the delight that it gave me, Mme. de Guermantes, who was getting ready to go on to another, final party, had said to me, almost as a justification and for fear of my not being quite certain who she was, since I appeared so astonished at being invited to dine with her: "You know I'm the aunt of Robert de Saint-Loup, who is such a friend of yours; besides we have met before." In replying that I was aware of this I added that I knew also M. de Charlus, "who had been very good to me at Balbec and in Paris." Mme. de Guermantes appeared dumbfoundered, and her eyes seemed to turn, as though for a verification of this statement, to some page, already filled and turned, of her internal register of events. "What, so you know Palamède, do you?" This name assumed on the lips of Mme. de Guermantes a great charm, due to the instinctive simplicity with which she spoke of a man who was socially so brilliant a figure, but for her was no more than her brother-in-law and the cousin with whom she had grown up. And on the confused greyness which the life of the Duchesse de Guermantes was for me this name, Palamède, shed as it were the radiance of long summer days on which she had played with him as a girl, at Guermantes, in the garden. Moreover, in this long outgrown period in their lives, Oriane de Guermantes and her cousin Palamède had been very different from what they had since become; M. de Charlus in particular, entirely absorbed in the artistic pursuits from which he had so effectively restrained himself in later life that I was stupefied to learn that it was he who had painted the huge fan with black and yellow irises which the Duchess was at this moment unfurling. She could also have shewn me a little sonatina which he had once composed for her. I was completely unaware that the Baron possessed all these talents, of which he never spoke. Let me remark in passing that M. de Charlus did not at all relish being called 'Palamède' by his family. That the form 'Mémé' might not please him one could easily understand. These stupid abbreviations are a sign of the utter inability of the aristocracy to appreciate its own poetic beauty (in Jewry, too, we may see the same defect, since a nephew of Lady Israels, whose name was Moses, was commonly known as 'Momo') concurrently with its anxiety not to appear to attach any importance to what is aristocratic. Now M. de Charlus had, in this connexion, a greater wealth of poetic imagination and a more blatant pride. But the reason for his distaste for 'Mémé' could not be this, since it extended also to the fine name Palamède. The truth was that, considering, knowing himself to come of a princely stock, he would have liked his brother and sister-in-law to refer to him as 'Charlus,' just as Queen Marie-Amélie and Duc d'Orléans might have spoken of their sons and grandsons, brothers and nephews as 'Joinville, Nemours, Chartres, Paris.'

"What a humbug Mémé is!" she exclaimed. "We talked to him about you for hours; he told us that he would be delighted to make your acquaintance, just as if he had never set eyes on you. You must admit he's odd, and—though it's not very nice of me to say such a thing about a brother-in-law I'm devoted to, and really do admire immensely—a trifle mad at times."

I was struck by the application of this last epithet to M. de Charlus, and said to myself that this half-madness might perhaps account for certain things, such as his having appeared so delighted by his own proposal that I should ask Bloch to castigate his mother. I decided that, by reason not only of the things he said but of the way in which he said them, M. de Charlus must be a little mad. The first time that one listens to a barrister or an actor, one is surprised by his tone, so different from the conversational. But, observing that everyone else seems to find this quite natural, one says nothing about it to other people, one says nothing in fact to oneself, one is content with appreciating the degree of talent shewn. At the most, one may think, of an actor at the Théâtre-Français: "Why, instead of letting his raised arm fall naturally, did he make it drop in a series of little jerks broken by pauses for at least ten minutes?" or of a Labori: "Why, whenever he opened his mouth, did he utter those tragic, unexpected sounds to express the simplest things?" But as everybody admits these actions to be necessary and obvious one is not shocked by them. So, upon thinking it over, one said to oneself that M. de Charlus spoke of himself with undue emphasis in a tone which was not in the least that of ordinary speech. It seemed as though one might have at any moment interrupted him with: "But why do you shout so? Why are you so offensive?" only everyone seemed to have tacitly agreed that it was all right. And one took one's place in the circle which applauded his outbursts. But certainly, at certain moments, a stranger might have thought that he was listening to the ravings of a maniac.

"But are you sure you're not thinking of some one else? Do you really mean my brother-in-law Palamède?" went on the Duchess, a trace of impertinence grafted upon her natural simplicity.

I replied that I was absolutely sure, and that M. de Charlus must have failed to catch my name.

"Oh well! I shall leave you now," said Mme. de Guermantes, as though she regretted the parting. "I must look in for a moment at the Princesse de Ligne's. You aren't going on there? No? You don't care for parties? You're very wise, they are too boring for words. If only I hadn't got to go. But she's my cousin; it wouldn't be polite. I am sorry, selfishly, for my own sake, because I could have taken you there, and brought you back afterwards, too. So I shall say good-bye now, and look forward to Friday."

That M. de Charlus should have blushed to be seen with me by M. d'Argencourt was all very well. But that to his own sister-in-law, who had so high an opinion of him besides, he should deny all knowledge of me, knowledge which was perfectly natural seeing that I was a friend of both his aunt and his nephew, was a thing that I could not understand.

I shall end my account of this incident with the remark that from one point of view there was in Mme. de Guermantes a true greatness which consisted in her entirely obliterating from her memory what other people would have only partially forgotten. Had she never seen me waylaying her, following her, tracking her down as she took her morning walks, had she never responded to my daily salute with an angry impatience, had she never refused Saint-Loup when he begged her to invite me to her house, she could not have greeted me now in a nobler or more gracious manner. Not only did she waste no time in retrospective explanations, in hints, allusions or ambiguous smiles, not only was there in her present affability, without any harking back to the past, without any reticence, something as proudly rectilinear as her majestic stature, but the resentment which she might have felt against anyone in the past was so entirely reduced to ashes, the ashes were themselves cast so utterly from her memory, or at least from her manner, that on studying her face whenever she had occasion to treat with the most exquisite simplification what in so many other people would have been a pretext for reviving stale antipathies and recriminations one had the impression of an intense purity of mind.

But if I was surprised by the modification that had occurred in her opinion of me, how much more did it surprise me to find a similar but ever so much greater change in my feeling for her. Had there not been a time during which I could regain life and strength only if—always building new castles in the air!—I had found some one who would obtain for me an invitation to her house and, after this initial boon, would procure many others for my increasingly exacting heart? It was the impossibility of finding any avenue there that had made me leave Paris for Doncières to visit Robert de Saint-Loup. And now it was indeed by the consequence of a letter from him that I was agitated, but on account this time of Mme. de Stermaria, not of Mme. de Guermantes.

Let me add further, to conclude my account of this party, that there occurred at it an incident, contradicted a few days later, which continued to puzzle me, interrupted for some time my friendship with Bloch, and constitutes in itself one of those curious paradoxes the explanation of which will be found in the next part of this work. At this party at Mme. de Villeparisis's, Bloch kept on boasting to me about the friendly attentions shewn him by M. de Charlus, who, when he passed him in the street, looked him straight in the face as though he recognised him, was anxious to know him personally, knew quite well who he was. I smiled at first, Bloch having expressed so vehemently at Balbec his contempt for the said M. de Charlus. And I supposed merely that Bloch, like his father in the case of Bergotte, knew the Baron 'without actually knowing him,' and that what he took for a friendly glance was due to absent-mindedness. But finally Bloch became so precise and appeared so confident that on two or three occasions M. de Charlus had wished to address him that, remembering that I had spoken of my friend to the Baron, who had, as we walked away together from this very house, as it happened, asked me various questions about him, I came to the conclusion that Bloch was not lying, that M. de Charlus had heard his name, realised that he was my friend, and so forth. And so, a little later, at the theatre one evening, I asked M. de Charlus if I might introduce Bloch to him, and, on his assenting, went in search of my friend. But as soon as M. de Charlus caught sight of him an expression of astonishment, instantly repressed, appeared on his face, where it gave way to a blazing fury. Not only did he not offer Bloch his hand but whenever Bloch spoke to him he replied in the most insolent manner, in an angry and wounding tone. So that Bloch, who, according to his version, had received nothing until then from the Baron but smiles, assumed that I had not indeed commended but disparaged him in the short speech in which, knowing M. de Charlus's liking for formal procedure, I had told him about my friend before bringing him up to be introduced. Bloch left us, his spirit broken, like a man who has been trying to mount a horse which is always ready to take the bit in its teeth, or to swim against waves which continually dash him back on the shingle, and did not speak to me again for six months.

The days that preceded my dinner with Mme. de Stermaria were for me by no means delightful, in fact it was all I could do to live through them. For as a general rule, the shorter the interval is that separates us from our planned objective, the longer it seems to us, because we apply to it a more minute scale of measurement, or simply because it occurs to us to measure it at all. The Papacy, we are told, reckons by centuries, and indeed may not think perhaps of reckoning time at all, since its goal is in eternity. Mine was no more than three days off; I counted by seconds, I gave myself up to those imaginings which are the first movements of caresses, of caresses which it maddens us not to be able to make the woman herself reciprocate and complete—those identical caresses, to the exclusion of all others. And, as a matter of fact, it is true that, generally speaking, the difficulty of attaining to the object of a desire enhances that desire (the difficulty, not the impossibility, for that suppresses it altogether), yet in the case of a desire that is wholly physical the certainty that it will be realised, at a fixed and not distant point in time, is scarcely less exciting than uncertainty; almost as much as an anxious doubt, the absence of doubt makes intolerable the period of waiting for the pleasure that is bound to come, because it makes of that suspense an innumerably rehearsed accomplishment and by the frequency of our proleptic representations divides time into sections as minute as could be carved by agony. What I required was to possess Mme. de Stermaria, for during the last few days, with an incessant activity, my desires had been preparing this pleasure, in my imagination, and this pleasure alone, for any other kind (pleasure, that is, taken with another woman) would not have been ready, pleasure being but the realisation of a previous wish, and of one which is not always the same, but changes according to the endless combinations of one's fancies, the accidents of one's memory, the state of one's temperament, the variability of one's desires, the most recently granted of which lie dormant until the disappointment of their satisfaction has been to some extent forgotten; I should not have been prepared, I had already turned from the main road of general desires and had ventured along the bridle-path of a particular desire; I should have had—in order to wish for a different assignation—to retrace my steps too far before rejoining the main road and taking another path. To take possession of Mme. de Stermaria on the island in the Bois de Boulogne where I had asked her to dine with me, this was the pleasure that I imagined to myself afresh every moment. It would have automatically perished if I had dined on that island without Mme. de Stermaria; but perhaps as greatly diminished had I dined, even with her, somewhere else. Besides, the attitudes in which one pictures a pleasure to oneself exist previously to the woman, to the type of woman required to give one that pleasure. They dictate the pleasure, and the place as well, and on that account bring to the fore alternatively, in our capricious fancy, this or that woman, this or that scene, this or that room, which in other weeks we should have dismissed with contempt. Child of the attitude that produced her, one woman will not appeal to us without the large bed in which we find peace by her side, while others, to be caressed with a more secret intention, require leaves blown by the wind, water rippling in the night, are as frail and fleeting as they.

No doubt in the past, long before I received Saint-Loup's letter and when there was as yet no question of Mme. de Stermaria, the island in the Bois had seemed to me to be specially designed for pleasure, because I had found myself going there to taste the bitterness of having no pleasure to enjoy in its shelter. It is to the shores of the lake from which one goes to that island, and along which, in the last weeks of summer, those ladies of Paris who have not yet left for the country take the air, that, not knowing where to look for her, or if indeed she has not already left Paris, one wanders in the hope of seeing the girl go by with whom one fell in love at the last ball of the season, whom one will not have a chance of meeting again in any drawing-room until the following spring. Feeling it to be at least the eve, if not the morrow, of the beloved's departure, one follows along the brink of the shivering water those attractive paths by which already a first red leaf is blooming like a last rose, one scans that horizon where, by a device the opposite of that employed in those panoramas beneath whose domed roofs the wax figures in the foreground impart to the painted canvas beyond them the illusory appearance of depth and mass, our eyes, passing without any transition from the cultivated park to the natural heights of Meudon and the Mont Valérien, do not know where to set the boundary, and make the natural country trespass upon the handiwork of the gardener, of which they project far beyond its own limits the artificial charm; like those rare birds reared in the open in a botanical garden which every day in the liberty of their winged excursions sally forth to strike, among the surrounding woods, an exotic note. Between the last festivity of summer and one's winter exile, one ranges anxiously that romantic world of chance encounters and lover's melancholy, and one would be no more surprised to learn that it was situated outside the mapped universe than if, at Versailles, looking down from the terrace, an observatory round which the clouds are massed against a blue sky in the manner of Van der Meulen, after having thus risen above the bounds of nature, one were informed that, there where nature begins again at the end of the great canal, the villages which one just could not make out, on a horizon as dazzling as the sea, were called Fleurus or Nimègue.

And then, the last carriage having rolled by, when one feels with a throb of pain that she will not come now, one goes to dine on the island; above the shivering poplars which suggest endless mysteries of evening though without response, a pink cloud paints a last touch of life in the tranquil sky. A few drops of rain fall without noise on the water, ancient but still in its divine infancy coloured always by the weather and continually forgetting the reflexions of clouds and flowers. And after the geraniums have vainly striven, by intensifying the brilliance of their scarlet, to resist the gathering darkness, a mist rises to envelop the now slumbering island; one walks in the moist dimness along the water's edge, where at the most the silent passage of a swan startles one like, in a bed, at night, the eyes, for a moment wide open, and the swift smile of a child whom one did not suppose to be awake. Then one would like to have with one a loving companion, all the more as one feels oneself to be alone and can imagine oneself to be far away from the world.

But to this island, where even in summer there was often a mist, how much more gladly would I have brought Mme. de Stermaria now that the cold season, the back end of autumn had come. If the weather that had prevailed since Sunday had not by itself rendered grey and maritime the scenes in which my imagination was living—as other seasons made them balmy, luminous, Italian—the hope of, in a few days' time, making Mme. de Stermaria mine would have been quite enough to raise, twenty times in an hour, a curtain of mist in my monotonously lovesick imagination. In any event the mist, which since yesterday had risen even in Paris, not only made me think incessantly of the native place of the young woman whom I had invited to dine with me, but, since it was probable that, far more thickly than in the streets of the town, it must after sunset be invading the Bois, especially the shores of the lake, I thought that it would make the Swans' Island, for me, something like that Breton island the marine and misty atmosphere of which had always enwrapped in my mind like a garment the pale outline of Mme. de Stermaria. Of course when we are young, at the age I had reached at the period of my walks along the Méséglise way, our desires, our faith bestow on a woman's clothing an individual personality, an ultimate quintessence. We pursue reality. But by dint of allowing it to escape we end by noticing that, after all those vain endeavours which have led to nothing, something solid subsists, which is what we have been seeking. We begin to separate, to recognise what we love, we try to procure it for ourselves, be it only by a stratagem. Then, in the absence of our vanished faith. costume fills the gap, by means of a deliberate illusion. I knew quite well that within half an hour of home I should not find myself in Brittany. But in walking arm in arm with Mme. de Stermaria in the dusk of the island, by the water's edge, I should be acting like other men who, unable to penetrate the walls of a convent, do at least, before enjoying a woman, clothe her in the habit of a nun.

I could even look forward to hearing, as I sat with the lady, the lapping of waves, for, on the day before our dinner, a storm broke over Paris. I was beginning to shave myself before going to the island to engage the room (albeit at this time of year the island was empty and the restaurant deserted) and order the food for our dinner next day when Françoise came in to tell me that Albertine had called. I made her come in at once, indifferent to her finding me disfigured by a bristling chin, her for whom at Balbec I had never felt smart enough and who had cost me then as much agitation and distress as Mme. de Stermaria was costing me now. The latter, I was determined, must go away with the best possible impression from our evening together. Accordingly I asked Albertine to come with me there and then to the island to order the food. She to whom one gives everything is so quickly replaced by another that one is surprised to find oneself giving all that one has, afresh, at every moment, without any hope of future reward. At my suggestion the smiling rosy face beneath Albertine's flat cap, which came down very low, to her eyebrows, seemed to hesitate. She had probably other plans; if so she sacrificed them willingly, to my great satisfaction, for I attached the utmost importance to my having with me a young housewife who would know a great deal more than myself about ordering dinner.

It is quite true that she had represented something utterly different for me at Balbec. But our intimacy, even when we do not consider it close enough at the time, with a woman with whom we are in love creates between her and us, in spite of the shortcomings that pain us while our love lasts, social ties which outlast our love and even the memory of our love. Then, in her who is nothing more for us than a means of approach, an avenue towards others, we are just as astonished and amused to learn from our memory what her name meant originally to that other creature which we then were as if, after giving a cabman an address in the Boulevard des Capucines or the Rue du Bac, thinking only of the person whom we are going to see there, we remind ourself that the names were once those of, respectively, the Capuchin nuns whose convent stood on the site and the ferry across the Seine.

At the same time, my Balbec desires had so generously ripened Albertine's body, had gathered and stored in it savours so fresh and sweet that, as we drove through the Bois, while the wind like a careful gardener shook the trees, brought down the fruit, swept up the fallen leaves, I said to myself that had there been any risk of Saint-Loup's being mistaken, or of my having misunderstood his letter, so that my dinner with Mme. de Stermaria might lead to no satisfactory result, I should have made an appointment for the same evening, later on, with Albertine, so as to forget, for a purely voluptuous hour, as I held in my arms a body of which my curiosity had long since computed, weighed up all the possible charms in which now it abounded, the emotions and perhaps the regrets of this first phase of love for Mme. de Stermaria. And certainly if I could have supposed that Mme. de Stermaria would not grant me any of her favours at our first meeting, I should have formed a slightly depressing picture of my evening with her. I knew too well from experience how the two stages which occur in us in the first phase of our love for a woman whom we have desired without knowing her, loving in her rather the particular kind of existence in which she is steeped than her still unfamiliar self—how distorted is the reflexion of those two stages in the world of facts, that is to say not in ourselves any longer but in our meetings with her. We have, without ever having talked to her, hesitated, tempted as we were by the poetic charm which she represented for us. Shall it be this woman or another? And lo, our dreams become fixed round about her, cease to have any separate existence from her. The first meeting with her which will shortly follow should reflect this dawning love. Nothing of the sort. As if it were necessary that our material life should have its first period also, in love with her already, we talk to her in the most trivial fashion: "I asked you to dine on this island because I thought the surroundings would amuse you. I've nothing particular to say to you, don't you know. But it's rather damp, I'm afraid, and you may find it cold—" "Oh, no, not at all!" "You just say that out of politeness. Very well, Madame, I shall allow you to battle against the cold for another quarter of an hour, as I don't want to bother you, but in fifteen minutes I shall carry you off by force. I don't want to have you catching a chill." And without another word said we take her home, remembering nothing about her, at the most a certain look in her eyes, but thinking only of seeing her again. Well, at our second meeting (when we do not find even that look, our sole memory of her, but nevertheless have been thinking only of seeing her again), the first stage is passed. Nothing has happened in the interval. And yet, instead of talking about the comfort or want of comfort of the restaurant, we say, without our words appearing to surprise the new person, who seems to us positively plain but to whom we should like to think that people were talking about us at every moment in her life: "We are going to have our work cut out to overcome all the obstacles in our way. Do you think we shall be successful? Do you suppose that we can triumph over our enemies—live happily ever afterwards, and all that sort of thing?" But these conversational openings, trivial to begin with, then hinting at love, would not be required; I could trust Saint-Loup's letter for that. Mme. de Stermaria would yield herself to me from the first, I should have no need therefore to engage Albertine to come to me, as a makeshift, later in the evening. It would be superfluous; Robert never exaggerated, and his letter was explicit.

Albertine spoke hardly at all, conscious that my thoughts were elsewhere. We went a little way on foot into the greenish, almost submarine grotto of a dense mass of trees, on the domed tops of which we heard the wind sweep and the rain pelt. I trod underfoot dead leaves which, like shells, were trampled into the soil, and poked with my stick at fallen chestnuts prickly as sea-urchins.

On the boughs the last clinging leaves, shaken by the wind, followed it only as far as their stems would allow, but sometimes these broke, and they fell to the ground, along which they coursed to overtake it. I thought with joy how much more remote still, if this weather lasted, the island would be on the morrow—and in any case quite deserted. We returned to our carriage and, as the storm had passed off, Albertine asked me to take her on to Saint-Cloud. As on the ground the drifting leaves so up above the clouds were chasing the wind. And a stream of migrant evenings, of which a sort of conic section cut through the sky made visible the successive layers, pink, blue and green, were gathered in readiness for departure to warmer climes. To obtain a closer view of a marble goddess who had been carved in the act of leaping from her pedestal and, alone in a great wood which seemed to be consecrated to her, filled it with the mythological terror, half animal, half divine, of her frenzied bounding, Albertine climbed a grassy slope while I waited for her in the road. She herself, seen thus from below, no longer coarse and plump as, a few days earlier, on my bed when the grain of her throat became apparent in the lens of my eye as it approached her person, but chiselled and delicate, seemed a little statue on which our happy hours together at Balbec had left their patina. When I found myself alone again at home, and remembered that I had taken a drive that afternoon with Albertine, that I was to dine in two days' time with Mme. de Guermantes and that I had to answer a letter from Gilberte, three women each of whom I had once loved, I said to myself that our social existence is, like an artist's studio, filled with abandoned sketches in which we have fancied for a moment that we could set down in permanent form our need of a great love, but it did not occur to me that sometimes, if the sketch be not too old, it may happen that we return to it and make of it a work wholly different, and possibly more important than what we had originally planned.

The next day was cold and fine; winter was in the air—indeed the season was so far advanced that it had seemed miraculous that we should find in the already pillaged Bois a few domes of gilded green. When I awoke I saw, as from the window of the barracks at Doncières, a uniform, dead white mist which hung gaily in the sunlight, consistent and sweet as a web of spun sugar. Then the sun withdrew, and the mist thickened still further in the afternoon. Night fell early, I made ready for dinner, but it was still too soon to start; I decided to send a carriage for Mme. de Stermaria. I did not like to go for her in it myself, not wishing to force my company on her, but I gave the driver a note for her in which I asked whether she would mind my coming to call for her. While I waited for her answer I lay down on my bed, shut my eyes for a moment, then opened them again. Over the top of the curtains there was nothing now but a thin strip of daylight which grew steadily fainter. I recognised that wasted hour, the large ante-room of pleasure, the dark, delicious emptiness of which I had learned at Balbec to know and to enjoy when, alone in my room as I was now, while all the rest were at dinner, I saw without regret the daylight fade from above my curtains, knowing that, presently, after a night of arctic brevity, it was to be resuscitated in a more dazzling brightness in the lighted rooms of Rivebelle. I sprang from my bed, tied my black necktie, passed a brush over my hair, final gestures of a belated tidying carried out at Balbec with my mind not on myself but on the women whom I should see at Rivebelle, while I smiled at them in anticipation in the mirror that stood across a corner of my room, gestures which, on that account, had continued to herald a form of entertainment in which music and lights would be mingled. Like magic signs they summoned, nay rather presented this entertainment already; thanks to them I had, of its intoxicating frivolous charm, as complete an enjoyment as I had had at Combray, in the month of July, when I heard the hammer-blows ring on the packing cases and enjoyed, in the coolness of my darkened room, a sense of warmth and sunshine.

Also, it was no longer exactly Mme. de Stermaria that I should have wished most to see. Forced now to spend my evening with her, I should have preferred, as it was almost the last before the return of my parents, that it should remain free and myself try instead to find some of the women from Rivebelle. I gave my hands one more final wash and, my sense of pleasure keeping me on the move, dried them as I walked through the shuttered dining-room. It appeared to have a door open on to the lighted hall, but what I had taken for the bright chink of the door, which as a matter of fact was closed, was only the gleaming reflexion of my towel in a mirror that had been laid against the wall in readiness to be fixed in its place before Mamma's return. I thought of all the other illusions of the sort which I had discovered in different parts of the house, and which were not optical only, for when we first came there I had supposed that our next-door neighbour kept a dog on account of the continuous, almost human yapping which came from a certain pipe in the kitchen whenever the tap was turned on. And the door on to the outer landing never closed by itself, very gently, caught by a draught on the staircase, without rendering those broken, voluptuous, whimpering passages which sound over the chant of the pilgrims towards the end of Overture to *Tannhäuser*. I had, moreover, just as I had put my towel back on its rail, an opportunity of hearing a fresh rendering of this brilliant symphonic fragment, for at a peal of the bell I hurried out to open the door to the driver who had come with Mme. de Stermaria's answer. I thought that his message would be: "The lady is downstairs," or "The lady is waiting." But he had a letter in his hand. I hesitated for a moment before looking to see what Mme. de Stermaria had written, who, while she held the pen in her hand, might have been anything but was now, detached from herself, an engine of fate, pursuing a course alone, which she was utterly powerless to alter. I asked the driver to wait downstairs for a moment, although he was cursing the fog. As soon as he had gone I opened the envelope. On her card, inscribed *Vicomtesse Alix de Stermaria,* my guest had written: "Am so sorry—am unfortunately prevented from dining with you this evening on the island in the Bois. Had been so looking forward to it. Will write you a proper letter from Stermaria. Very sorry. Kindest regards." I stood motionless, stunned by the shock that I had received. At my feet lay the card and envelope, fallen like the spent cartridge from a gun when the shot has been fired. I picked them up, tried to analyse her message. "She says that she cannot dine with me on the island in the Bois. One might gather from that that she would dine with me somewhere else. I shall not be so indiscreet as to go and fetch her, but, after all, that is quite a reasonable interpretation." And from that island in the Bois, as for the last few days my thoughts had been installed there beforehand with Mme. de Stermaria, I could not succeed in bringing them back to where I was. My desire responded automatically to the gravitational force which had been pulling it now for so many hours on end, and in spite of this message, too recent to counteract that force, I went on instinctively getting ready to start, just as a student, although ploughed by the examiners, tries to answer one question more. At last I decided to tell Françoise to go down and pay the driver. I went along the passage without finding her, I passed through the dining-room, where suddenly my feet ceased to sound on the bare boards as they had been doing and were hushed to a silence which, even before I had realised the explanation of it, gave me a feeling of suffocation and confinement. It was the carpets which, in view of my parents' return, the servants had begun to put down again, those carpets which look so well on bright mornings when amid their disorder the sun stays and waits for you like a friend come to take you out to luncheon in the country, and casts over them the dappled light and shade of the forest, but which now on the contrary were the first installation of the wintry prison from which, obliged as I should be to live, to take my meals at home, I should no longer be free now to escape when I chose.

"Take care you don't slip, Sir; they're not tacked yet," Françoise called to me. "I ought to have lighted up. Oh, dear, it's the end of 'Sectember' already, the fine days are over." In no time, winter; at the corner of a window, as in a Gallé glass, a vein of crusted snow; and even in the Champs-Elysées, instead of the girls one waits to see, nothing but solitary sparrows.

What added to my distress at not seeing Mme. de Stermaria was that her answer led me to suppose that whereas, hour by hour, since Sunday, I had been living for this dinner alone, she had presumably never given it a second thought. Later on I learned of an absurd love match that she had suddenly made with a young man whom she must already have been seeing at this time, and who had presumably made her forget my invitation. For if she had remembered it she would surely never have waited for the carriage which I was not, for that matter, supposed to be sending for her, to inform me that she was otherwise engaged. My dreams of a young feudal maiden on a misty island had cleared the way to a still non-existent love. Now my disappointment, my rage, my desperate desire to recapture her who had just refused me were able, by bringing my sensibility into play, to make definite the possible love which until then my imagination alone had—and that more loosely—offered me.

How many are there in our memories, how many more have we forgotten, of these faces of girls and young women, all different, to which we have added a certain charm and a frenzied desire to see them again only because at the last moment they eluded us? In the case of Mme. de Stermaria there was a good deal more than this, and it was enough now to make me love her for me to see her again so that I might refresh those impressions, so vivid but all too brief, which my memory would not, without such refreshment, have the strength to keep alive when we were apart.

Circumstances decided against me; I did not see her again. It was not she that I loved, but it might well have been. And one of the things that made most cruel, perhaps, the great love which was presently to come to me was that when I thought of this evening I used to say to myself that my love might, given a slight modification of very ordinary circumstances, have been directed elsewhere, to Mme. de Stermaria; its application to her who inspired it in me so soon afterwards was not therefore—as I so longed, so needed to believe—absolutely necessary and predestined.

Françoise had left me by myself in the dining-room with the remark that it was foolish of me to stay there before she had lighted the fire. She went to get me some dinner, for even before the return of my parents, from this very evening, my seclusion was to begin. I caught sight of a huge bundle of carpets, still rolled up, and leaning against one end of the sideboard, and burying my head in it, swallowing its dust with my own tears, as the Jews used to cover their heads with ashes in times of mourning, I began to sob. I shuddered not only because the room was cold, but because a distinct lowering of temperature (against the danger and—I should add, perhaps—the by no means disagreeable sensation of which we make no attempt to react) is brought about by a certain kind of tears which fall from our eyes, drop by drop, like a fine, penetrating, icy rain, and seem as though never would they cease to flow. Suddenly I heard a voice:

"May I come in? Françoise told me you would be in the dining-room. I looked in to see whether you would care to come out and dine somewhere, if it isn't bad for your throat—there's a fog outside you could cut with a knife."

It was—arrived in Paris that morning, when I imagined him to be still in Morocco or on the sea—Robert de Saint-Loup.

I have already said (as a matter of fact, it was Robert himself who, at Balbec, had helped me, quite without meaning it, to arrive at this conclusion) what I think about friendship: to wit that it is so small a thing that I find it hard to understand how men with some claim to genius—Nietzsche, for instance—can have been such simpletons as to ascribe to it a certain intellectual value, and consequently to deny themselves friendships in which intellectual esteem would have no part. Yes, it has always been a surprise to me to find a man who carried sincerity towards himself to so high a pitch as to cut himself off, by a scruple of conscience, from Wagner's music, imagining that the truth could ever be attained by the mode of expression, naturally vague and inadequate, which our actions in general and acts of friendship in particular furnish, or that there could be any kind of significance in the fact of one's leaving one's work to go and see a friend and shed tears with him on hearing the false report that the Louvre was burned. I had got so far, at Balbec, as to find that the pleasure of playing with a troop of girls is less destructive of the spiritual life, to which at least it remains alien, than friendship, the whole effort of which is directed towards making us sacrifice the one real and (save by the channel of art) incommunicable part of ourself to a superficial self which finds—not, like the other, any joy in itself, but rather a vague, sentimental attraction in the feeling that it is being supported by external props, hospitably entertained by a strange personality, through which, happy in the protection that is afforded it there, it makes its own comfort radiate in warm approval, and marvels at qualities which it would denounce as faults and seek to correct in itself. Moreover the scorners of friendship can, without illusion and not without remorse, be the finest friends in the world, just as an artist carrying in his brain a masterpiece and feeling that his duty is rather to live and carry on his work, nevertheless, so as not to be thought or to run the risk of actually being selfish, gives his life for a vain cause, and gives it all the more gallantly in that the reasons for which he would have preferred not to give it were disinterested. But whatever might be my opinion of friendship, to mention only the pleasure that it procured me, of a quality so mediocre as to be like something halfway between physical exhaustion and mental boredom, there is no brew so deadly that it cannot at certain moments become precious and invigorating by giving us just the stimulus that was necessary, the warmth that we cannot generate in ourselves.

The thought of course never entered my mind now of asking Saint-Loup to take me (as, an hour earlier, I had been longing to go) to see some of the Rivebelle women; the scar left by my disappointment with Mme. de Stermaria was too recent still to be so easily healed, but at the moment when I had ceased to feel in my heart any reason for happiness Saint-Loup's bursting in upon me was like a sudden apparition of kindness, mirth, life, which were external to me, no doubt, but offered themselves to me, asked only to be made mine. He did not himself understand my shout of gratitude, my tears of affection. And yet is there anything more unaccountably affecting than one of those friends, be he diplomat, explorer, airman or soldier like Saint-Loup, who, having to start next day for the country, from where they will go on heaven knows where, seem to form for themselves, in the evening which they devote to us, an impression which we are astonished both to find, so rare and fleeting is it, can be so pleasant to them, and, since it does so delight them, not to see them prolong farther or repeat more often. A meal with us, an event so natural in itself, affords these travellers the same strange and exquisite pleasure as our boulevards give to an Asiatic. We set off together to dine, and as I went downstairs I thought of Doncières where every evening I used to meet Robert at his restaurant, and the little dining-rooms there that I had forgotten. I remembered one of these to which I had never given a thought, and which was not in the hotel where Saint-Loup dined but in another, far humbler, a cross between an inn and a boarding-house, where the waiting was done by the landlady and one of her servants. I had been forced to take shelter there once from a snowstorm. Besides, Robert was not to be dining at the hotel that evening and I had not cared to go any farther. My food was brought to me, upstairs, in a little room with bare wooden walls. The lamp went out during dinner and the servant lighted a couple of candles. I, pretending that I could not see very well as I held out my plate, while she helped me to potatoes, took her bare fore-arm in my hand, as though to guide her. Seeing that she did not withdraw it, I began to fondle it, then, without saying a word, pulled her bodily to me, blew out the candles and told her to feel in my pocket for some money. For the next few days physical pleasure seemed to me to require, to be properly enjoyed, not only this servant but the timbered dining-room, so remote and lonely. And yet it was to the other, in which Saint-Loup and his friends dined, that I returned every evening, from force of habit and in friendship for them, until I left Doncières. But even of this hotel, where he took his meals with his friends, I had long ceased to think; we make little use of our experience, we leave unconsumed in the summer dusk or precocious nights of winter the hours in which it had seemed to us that there might nevertheless be contained some element of tranquillity or pleasure. But those hours are not altogether wasted. When, in their turn, come and sing to us fresh moments of pleasure, which by themselves would pass by equally bare in outline, the others recur, bringing with them the groundwork, the solid consistency of a rich orchestration. They are in this way prolonged into one of those types of happiness which we recapture only now and again but which continue to exist; in the present instance the type was that of forsaking everything else to dine in comfortable surroundings, which by the help of memory embody in a scene from nature suggestions of the rewards of travel, with a friend who is going to stir our dormant life with all his energy, his affection, to communicate to us an emotional pleasure, very different from anything that we could derive from our own efforts or from social distractions; we are going to exist solely for him, to utter vows of friendship which, born within the confines of the hour, remaining imprisoned in it, will perhaps not be kept on the morrow but which I need have no scruple in taking before Saint-Loup since, with a courage into which there entered a great deal of common sense and the presentiment that friendship cannot explore its own depths, on the morrow he would be gone.

If as I came downstairs I lived over again the evenings at Doncières, when we reached the street, in a moment the darkness, now almost total, in which the fog seemed to have put out the lamps, which one could make out, glimmering very faintly, only when close at hand, took me back to I could not say what arrival, by night, at Combray, when the streets there were still lighted only at long intervals and one felt one's way through a darkness moist, warm, consecrated, like that of a Christmas manger, just visibly starred here and there by a wick that burned no brighter than a candle. Between that year—to which I could ascribe no precise date—of my Combray life and the evenings at Rivebelle which had, an hour earlier, been reflected above my drawn curtains, what a world of differences! I felt on perceiving them an enthusiasm which might have borne fruit had I been left alone and would then have saved me the unnecessary round of many wasted years through which I was yet to pass before there was revealed to me that invisible vocation of which these volumes are the history. Had the revelation come to me this evening, the carriage in which I sat would have deserved to rank as more memorable with me than Dr. Percepied's, on the box seat of which I had composed that little sketch—on which, as it happened, I had recently laid my hands, altered it and sent it in vain to the *Figaro*—of the spires of Martinville. Is it because we live over our past years not in their continuous sequence, day by day, but in a memory that fastens upon the coolness or sun-parched heat of some morning or afternoon, receives the shadow of some solitary place, is enclosed, immovable, arrested, lost, remote from all others, because, therefore, the changes gradually wrought not only in the world outside but in our dreams and our evolving character (changes which have imperceptibly carried us through life from one to another, wholly different time), are of necessity eliminated, that, if we revive another memory taken from a different year, we find between the two, thanks to lacunae, to vast stretches of oblivion, as it were the gulf of a difference in altitude or the incompatibility of two divers qualities, that of the air we breathe and the colour of the scene before our eyes? But between one and another of the memories that had now come to me in turn of Combray, of Doncières and of Rivebelle, I was conscious at the moment of more than a distance in time, of the distance that there would be between two separate universes the material elements in which were not the same. If I had sought to reproduce the element in which appeared carven my most trivial memories of Rivebelle, I should have had to streak with rosy veins, to render at once translucent, compact, refreshing, resonant a substance hitherto analogous to the coarse dark sandstone walls of Combray. But Robert having finished giving his instructions to the driver joined me now in the carriage. The ideas that had appeared before me took flight. Ideas are goddesses who deign at times to make themselves visible to a solitary mortal, at a turning in the road, even in his bedroom while he sleeps, when they, standing framed in the doorway, bring him the annunciation of their tidings. But as soon as a companion joins him they vanish, in the society of his fellows no man has ever beheld them. And I found myself cast back upon friendship. When he first appeared Robert had indeed warned me that there was a good deal of fog outside, but while we were indoors, talking, it had grown steadily thicker. It was no longer merely the light mist which I had looked forward to seeing rise from the island and envelop Mme. de Stermaria and myself. A few feet away from us the street lamps were blotted out and then it was night, as dark as in the open fields, in a forest, or rather on a mild Breton island whither I would fain have gone; I lost myself, as on the stark coast of some Northern sea where one risks one's life twenty times over before coming to the solitary inn; ceasing to be a mirage for which one seeks, the fog became one of those dangers against which one has to fight, so that we had, in finding our way and reaching a safe haven, the difficulties, the anxiety and finally the joy which safety, so little perceived by him who is not threatened with the loss of it, gives to the perplexed and benighted traveller. One thing only came near to destroying my pleasure during our adventurous ride, owing to the angry astonishment into which it flung me for a moment. "You know, I told Bloch," Saint-Loup suddenly informed me, "that you didn't really think all that of him, that you found him rather vulgar at times. I'm like that, you see, I want people to know where they stand," he wound up with a satisfied air and in a tone which brooked no reply. I was astounded. Not only had I the most absolute confidence in Saint-Loup, in the loyalty of his friendship, and he had betrayed it by what he had said to Bloch, but it seemed to me that he of all men ought to have been restrained from doing so, by his defects as well as by his good qualities, by that astonishing veneer of breeding which was capable of carrying politeness to what was positively a want of frankness. His triumphant air, was it what we assume to cloak a certain embarrassment in admitting a thing which we know that we ought not to have done, or did it mean complete unconsciousness; stupidity making a virtue out of a defect which I had not associated with him; a passing fit of ill humour towards me, prompting him to make an end of our friendship, or the notation in words of a passing fit of ill humour in the company of Bloch to whom he had felt that he must say something disagreeable, even although I should be compromised by it? However that might be, his face was seared, while he uttered this vulgar speech, by a frightful sinuosity which I saw on it once or twice only in all the time I knew him, and which, beginning by running more or less down the middle of his face, when it came to his lips twisted them, gave them a hideous expression of baseness, almost of bestiality, quite transitory and no doubt inherited. There must have been at such moments, which recurred probably not more than once every other year, a partial eclipse of his true self by the passage across it of the personality of some ancestor whose shadow fell on him. Fully as much as his satisfied air, the words: "I want people to know where they stand," encouraged the same doubt and should have incurred a similar condemnation. I felt inclined to say to him that if one wants people to know where they stand one ought to confine these outbursts of frankness to one's own affairs and not to acquire a too easy merit at the expense of others. But by this time the carriage had stopped outside the restaurant, the huge front of which, glazed and streaming with light, alone succeeded in piercing the darkness. The fog itself, beside the comfortable brightness of the lighted interior, seemed to be waiting outside on the pavement to shew one the way in with the joy of servants whose faces reflect the hospitable instincts of their master; shot with the most delicate shades of light, it pointed the way like the pillar of fire which guided the Children of Israel. Many of whom, as it happened, were to be found inside. For this was the place to which Bloch and his friends had long been in the habit, maddened by a hunger as famishing as the Ritual Fast, which at least occurs only once a year, for coffee and the satisfaction of political curiosity, of repairing in the evenings. Every mental excitement creating a value that overrides others, a quality superior to the rest of one's habits, there is no taste at all keenly developed that does not thus gather round it a society which it unites and in which the esteem of his fellows is what each of its members seeks before anything else from life. Here, in their café, be it in a little provincial town, you will find impassioned music-lovers; the greater part of their time, all their spare cash is spent in chamber-concerts, in meetings for musical discussion, in cafés where one finds oneself among musical people and rubs shoulders with the members of the orchestra. Others, keen upon flying, seek to stand well with the old waiter in the glazed bar perched on top of the aerodrome; sheltered from the wind as in the glass cage of a lighthouse, they can follow in the company of an airman who is not going up that day the evolutions of a pilot practising loops, while another, invisible a moment ago, comes suddenly swooping down to land with the great winged roar of an Arabian roc. The little group which met to try to perpetuate, to explore the fugitive emotions aroused by the Zola trial attached a similar importance to this particular café. But they were not viewed with favour by the young nobles who composed the rest of its patrons and had taken possession of a second room, separated from the other only by a flimsy parapet topped with a row of plants. These looked upon Dreyfus and his supporters as traitors, albeit twenty-five years later, ideas having had time to classify themselves and Dreyfusism to acquire, in the light of history, a certain distinction, the sons, dance-mad Bolshevists, of these same young nobles were to declare to the 'intellectuals' who questioned them that undoubtedly, had they been alive at the time, they would have stood up for Dreyfus, without having any clearer idea of what the great Case had been about than Comtesse Edmond de Pourtalès or the Marquise de Galliffet, other luminaries already extinct at the date of their birth. For on the night of the fog the noblemen of the café, who were in due course to become the fathers of these young intellectuals, Dreyfusards in retrospect, were still bachelors. Naturally the idea of a rich marriage was present in the minds of all their families, but none of them had yet brought such a marriage off. While still potential, the only effect of this rich marriage, the simultaneous ambition of several of them (there were indeed several heiresses in view, but after all the number of big dowries was considerably below that of the aspirants to them), was to create among these young men a certain amount of rivalry.

As ill luck would have it, Saint-Loup remaining outside for a minute to explain to the driver that he was to call for us again after dinner, I had to make my way in by myself. In the first place, once I had involved myself in the spinning door, to which I was not accustomed, I began to fear that I should never succeed in escaping from it. (Let me note here for the benefit of lovers of verbal accuracy that the contrivance in question, despite its peaceful appearance, is known as a 'revolver,' from the English 'revolving door.') This evening the proprietor, not venturing either to brave the elements outside or to desert his customers, remained standing near the entrance so as to have the pleasure of listening to the joyful complaints of the new arrivals, all aglow with the satisfaction of people who have had difficulty in reaching a place and have been afraid of losing their way. The smiling cordiality of his welcome was, however, dissipated by the sight of a stranger incapable of disengaging himself from the rotating sheets of glass. This flagrant sign of social ignorance made him knit his brows like an examiner who has a good mind not to utter the formula: *Dignus est intrare.* As a crowning error I went to look for a seat in the room set apart for the nobility, from which he at once expelled me, indicating to me, with a rudeness to which all the waiters at once conformed, a place in the other room. This was all the less to my liking because the seat was in the middle of a crowded row and I had opposite me the door reserved for the Hebrews which, as it did not revolve, opening and shutting at every moment kept me in a horrible draught. But the proprietor declined to move me, saying: "No, Sir, I cannot have the whole place upset for you." Presently, however, he forgot this belated and troublesome guest, captivated as he was by the arrival of each newcomer who, before calling for his beer, his wing of cold chicken or his hot grog (it was by now long past dinner-time), must first, as in the old romances, pay his scot by relating his adventure at the moment of his entry into this asylum of warmth and security where the contrast with the perils just escaped made that gaiety and sense of comradeship prevail which create a cheerful harmony round the campfire.

One reported that his carriage, thinking it had got to the Pont de la Concorde, had circled three times round the Invalides, another that his, in trying to make its way down the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, had driven into a clump of trees at the Rond Point, from which it had taken him three quarters of an hour to get clear. Then followed lamentations upon the fog, the cold, the deathly stillness of the streets, uttered and received with the same exceptionally jovial air, which was accounted for by the pleasant atmosphere of the room which, except where I sat, was warm, the dazzling light which set blinking eyes already accustomed to not seeing, and the buzz of talk which restored their activity to deafened ears.

It was all the newcomers could do to keep silence. The singularity of the mishaps which each of them thought unique burned their tongues, and their eyes roved in search of some one to engage in conversation. The proprietor himself lost all sense of social distinction. "M. le Prince de Foix lost his way three times coming from the Porte Saint-Martin," he was not afraid to say with a laugh, actually pointing out, as though introducing one to the other, the illustrious nobleman to an Israelite barrister, who, on any evening but this, would have been divided from him by a barrier far harder to surmount than the ledge of greenery. "Three times—fancy that!" said the barrister, touching his hat. This note of personal interest was not at all to the Prince's liking. He formed one of an aristocratic group for whom the practice of impertinence, even at the expense of their fellow-nobles when these were not of the very highest rank, seemed the sole possible occupation. Not to acknowledge a bow, and, if the polite stranger repeated the offence, to titter with sneering contempt or fling back one's head with a look of fury, to pretend not to know some elderly man who might have done them a service, to reserve their handclasp for dukes and the really intimate friends of dukes whom the latter introduced to them, such was the attitude of these young men, and especially of the Prince de Foix. Such an attitude was encouraged by the ill-balanced mentality of early manhood (a period in which, even in the middle class, one appears ungrateful and behaves like a cad because, having forgotten for months to write to a benefactor after he has lost his wife, one then ceases to nod to him in the street so as to simplify matters), but it was inspired above all by an over-acute caste snobbishness. It is true that, after the fashion of certain nervous affections the symptoms of which grow less pronounced in later life, this snobbishness was on the whole to cease to express itself in so offensive a form in these men who had been so intolerable when young. Once youth is outgrown, it is seldom that anyone remains hidebound by insolence. He had supposed it to be the only thing in the world; suddenly he discovers, for all the Prince that he is, that there also are such things as music, literature, even standing for parliament. The scale of human values is correspondingly altered and he joins in conversation with people whom at one time he would have slain with a glare of lightning. Which is fortunate for those of the latter who have had the patience to wait, and whose character is sufficiently formed—if one may so put it—for them to feel pleasure in receiving in their forties the civility and welcome that had been coldly withheld from them at twenty.

As I have mentioned the Prince de Foix, it may not be inconsequent here to add that he belonged to a set of a dozen or fifteen young men and to an inner group of four. The dozen or fifteen shared this characteristic (which the Prince lacked, I fancy) that each of them faced the world in a dual aspect. Up to their own eyes in debt, they were of no account in those of their tradesmen, notwithstanding the pleasure these took in addressing them as 'Monsieur le Comte,' 'Monsieur le Marquis,' 'Monsieur le Duc.' They hoped to retrieve their fortunes by means of the famous rich marriage ('money-bags' as the expression still was) and, as the fat dowries which they coveted numbered at the most four or five, several of them would be silently training their batteries on the same damsel. And the secret would be so well kept that when one of them, on arriving at the café, announced: "My dear fellows, I am too fond of you all not to tell you of my engagement to Mlle. d'Ambresac," there was a general outburst, more than one of the others imagining that the marriage was as good as settled already between Mlle. d'Ambresac and himself, and not having enough self-control to stifle a spontaneous cry of stupefaction and rage. "So you like the idea of marriage, do you Bibi?" the Prince de Châtellerault could not help exclaiming, letting his fork drop in his surprise and despair, for he had been fully expecting the engagement of this identical Mlle. d'Ambresac to be announced, but with himself, Châtellerault, as her bridegroom. And heaven only knew all that his father had cunningly hinted to the Ambresacs against Bibi's mother. "So you think it'll be fun, being married, do you?" he was impelled to repeat his question to Bibi, who, better prepared to meet it, for he had had plenty of time to decide on the right attitude to adopt since the engagement had reached the semi-official stage, replied with a smile: "What pleases me is not the idea of marriage, which never appealed much to me, but marrying Daisy d'Ambresac, whom I think charming." In the time taken up by this response M. de Châtellerault had recovered his composure, but he was thinking that he must at the earliest possible moment execute a change of front in the direction of Mlle. de la Canourque or Miss Foster, numbers two and three on the list of heiresses, pacify somehow the creditors who were expecting the Ambresac marriage and finally explain to the people to whom he too had declared that Mlle. d'Ambresac was charming that this marriage was all very well for Bibi, but that he himself would have had all his family down on him like a ton of bricks if he had married her. Mme. Soléon (he decided to say) had actually announced that she would not have them in her house.

But if in the eyes of tradesmen, proprietors of restaurants and the like they seemed of little account, conversely, being creatures of dual personality, the moment they appeared in society they ceased to be judged by the decay of their fortunes and the sordid occupations by which they sought to repair them. They became once more M. le Prince this, M. le Duc that, and were reckoned only in terms of their quarterings. A duke who was practically a multi-millionaire and seemed to combine in his own person every possible distinction gave precedence to them because, the heads of their various houses, they were by descent sovereign princes of minute territories in which they were entitled to coin money and so forth. Often in this café one of them lowered his eyes when another came in so as not to oblige the newcomer to greet him. This was because in his imaginative pursuit of riches he had invited a banker to dine. Every time that a man about town enters into relations, on this footing, with a banker, the latter leaves him the poorer by a hundred thousand francs, which does not prevent the man about town from at once repeating the process with another. We continue to burn candles in churches and to consult doctors.

But the Prince de Foix, who was rich already, belonged not only to this fashionable set of fifteen or so young men, but to a more exclusive and inseparable group of four which included Saint-Loup. These were never asked anywhere separately, they were known as the four *gigolos*, they were always to be seen riding together, in country houses their hostesses gave them communicating bedrooms, with the result that, especially as they were all four extremely good looking, rumours were current as to the extent of their intimacy. I was in a position to give these the lie direct so far as Saint-Loup was concerned. But the curious thing is that if, later on, one was to learn that these rumours were true of all four, each of the quartet had been entirely in the dark as to the other three. And yet each of them had done his utmost to find out about the others, to gratify a desire or (more probably) a resentment, to prevent a marriage or to secure a hold over the friend whose secret he discovered. A fifth (for in these groups of four there are never four only) had joined this Platonic party who was more so than any of the others. But religious scruples restrained him until long after the group had broken up, and he himself was a married man, the father of a family, fervently praying at Lourdes that the next baby might be a boy or a girl, and spending the intervals of procreation in the pursuit of soldiers.

Despite the Prince's code of manners, the fact that the barrister's comment, though uttered in his hearing, had not been directly addressed to him made him less angry than he would otherwise have been. Besides, this evening was somewhat exceptional. Finally, the barrister had no more prospect of coming to know the Prince de Foix than the cabman who had driven that noble lord to the restaurant. The Prince felt, accordingly, that he might allow himself to reply, in an arrogant tone, as though speaking to some one 'off stage,' to this stranger who, thanks to the fog, was in the position of a travelling companion whom one meets at some seaside place at the ends of the earth, scoured by all the winds of heaven or shrouded in mist: "Losing your way's nothing; the trouble is, you can't find it again." The wisdom of this aphorism impressed the proprietor, for he had already heard it several times in the course of the evening.

He was, in fact, in the habit of always comparing what he heard or read with an already familiar canon, and felt his admiration aroused if he could detect no difference. This state of mind is by no means to be ignored, for, applied to political conversations, to the reading of newspapers, it forms public opinion and thereby makes possible the greatest events in history. An aggregation of German landlords, simply by being impressed by a customer or a newspaper when he or it said that France, England and Russia were 'out to crush' Germany, made war, at the time of Agadir, possible, even if no war occurred. Historians, if they have not been wrong to abandon the practice of attributing the actions of peoples to the will of kings, ought to substitute for the latter the psychology of the person of no importance.

In politics the proprietor of this particular café had for some time now concentrated his pupil-teacher's mind on certain particular details of the Dreyfus case. If he did not find the terms that were familiar to him in the conversation of a customer or the columns of a newspaper he would pronounce the article boring or the speaker insincere. The Prince de Foix, however, impressed him so forcibly that he barely gave him time to finish what he was saying. "That's right, Prince, that's right," (which meant neither more nor less than 'repeated without a mistake') "that's exactly how it is!" he exclaimed, expanding, like people in the Arabian Nights 'to the limit of repletion.' But the Prince had by this time vanished into the smaller room. Then, as life resumes its normal course after even the most sensational happenings, those who had emerged from the sea of fog began to order whatever they wanted to eat or drink; among them a party of young men from the Jockey Club who, in view of the abnormality of the situation, had no hesitation in taking their places at a couple of tables in the big room, and were thus quite close to me. So the cataclysm had established even between the smaller room and the bigger, among all these people stimulated by the comfort of the restaurant after their long wanderings across the ocean of fog, a familiarity from which I alone was excluded, not unlike the spirit that must have prevailed in Noah's ark. Suddenly I saw the landlord's body whipped into a series of bows, the head waiters hurrying to support him in a full muster which drew every eye towards the door. "Quick, send Cyprien here, lay a table for M. le Marquis de Saint-Loup," cried the proprietor, for whom Robert was not merely a great nobleman possessing a real importance even in the eyes of the Prince de Foix, but a client who drove through life four-in-hand, so to speak, and spent a great deal of money in this restaurant. The customers in the big room looked on with interest, those in the small room shouted simultaneous greetings to their friend as he finished wiping his shoes. But just as he was about to make his way into the small room he caught sight of me in the big one. "Good God," he exclaimed, "what on earth are you doing there? And with the door wide open too?" he went on, with an angry glance at the proprietor, who ran to shut it, throwing the blame on his staff: "I'm always telling them to keep it shut."

I had been obliged to shift my own table and to disturb others which stood in the way in order to reach him. "Why did you move? Would you sooner dine here than in the little room? Why, my poor fellow, you're freezing. You will oblige me by keeping that door locked;" he turned to the proprietor. "This very instant, M. le Marquis; the gentlemen will have to go out of this room through the other, that is all." And the better to shew his zeal he detailed for this operation a head waiter and several satellites, vociferating the most terrible threats of punishment were it not properly carried out. He began to shew me exaggerated marks of respect, so as to make me forget that these had begun not upon my arrival but only after that of Saint-Loup, while, lest I should think them to have been prompted by the friendliness shewn me by his rich and noble client, he gave me now and again a surreptitious little smile which seemed to indicate a regard that was wholly personal.

Something said by one of the diners behind me made me turn my head for a moment. I had caught, instead of the words: "Wing of chicken, excellent; and a glass of champagne, only not too dry," the unexpected: "I should prefer glycerine. Yes, hot, excellent." I wanted to see who the ascetic was that was inflicting upon himself such a diet. I turned quickly back to Saint-Loup so as not to be recognised by the man of strange appetite. It was simply a doctor, whom I happened to know, and of whom another customer, taking advantage of the fog to buttonhole him here in the café, was asking his professional advice. Like stockbrokers, doctors employ the first person singular.

Meanwhile I was studying Saint-Loup, and my thoughts took a line of their own. They were in this café, I had myself known at other times, plenty of foreigners, intellectuals, budding geniuses of all sorts, resigned to the laughter excited by their pretentious capes, their 1830 neckties and still more by the clumsiness of their movements, going so far as to provoke that laughter in order to shew that they paid no heed to it, who yet were men of real intellectual and moral worth, of an extreme sensibility. They repelled—the Jews among them principally, the unassimilated Jews, that is to say, for with the other kind we are not concerned—those who could not endure any oddity or eccentricity of appearance (as Bloch repelled Albertine). Generally speaking, one realised afterwards that if they had against them hair worn too long, noses and eyes that were too big, stilted theatrical gestures, it was puerile to judge them by these only, they had plenty of intelligence and spirit and were men to whom, in the long run, one could become closely attached. Among the Jews especially there were few whose parents and kinsfolk had not a warmth of heart, a breadth of mind in comparison with which Saint-Loup's mother and the Duc de Guermantes cut the poorest of figures by their sereness, their skin-deep religiosity which denounced only the most open scandals, their apology for a Christianity which led invariably (by the unexpected channel of a purely calculating mind) to an enormously wealthy marriage. But in Saint-Loup, when all was said, however the faults of his relatives might be combined in a fresh creation of character, there reigned the most charming openness of mind and heart. And whenever (it must be frankly admitted, to the undying glory of France) these qualities are found in a man who is purely French, be he noble or plebeian, they flower—flourish would be too strong a word, for a sense of proportion persists and also a certain restraint—with a grace which the foreign visitor, however estimable he may be, does not present to us. Of these intellectual and moral qualities others undoubtedly have their share, and if we have first to overcome what repels us and what makes us smile they remain no less precious. But it is all the same a pleasant thing, and one which is perhaps exclusively French that what is fine from the standpoint of equity, what is of value to the heart and mind should be first of all attractive to the eyes, charmingly coloured, consummately chiselled, should express outwardly as well in substance as in form an inward perfection. I studied Saint-Loup's features and said to myself that it is a thing to be glad of when there is no lack of bodily grace to prepare one for the graces within, and when the winged nostrils are spread as delicately and with as perfect a design as the wings of the little butterflies that hover over the field-flowers round Combray; and that the true *opus francigenum,* the secret of which was not lost in the thirteenth century, the beauty of which would not be lost with the destruction of our churches, consists not so much in the stone angels of Saint-André-des-Champs as in the young sons of France, noble, citizen or peasant, whose faces are carved with that delicacy and boldness which have remained as traditional there as on the famous porch, but are creative still as well.

After leaving us for a moment in order to supervise personally the barring of the door and the ordering of our dinner (he laid great stress on our choosing 'butcher's meat,' the fowls being presumably nothing to boast of) the proprietor came back to inform us that M. le Prince de Foix would esteem it a favour if M. le Marquis would allow him to dine at a table next to ours. "But they are all taken," objected Robert, casting an eye over the tables which blocked the way to mine. "That doesn't matter in the least, if M. le Marquis would like it, I can easily ask these people to move to another table. It is always a pleasure to do anything for M. le Marquis!" "But you must decide," said Saint-Loup to me. "Foix is a good fellow, he may bore you or he may not; anyhow he's not such a fool as most of them." I told Robert that of course I should like to meet his friend but that now that I was for once in a way dining with him and was so entirely happy, I should be just as well pleased to have him all to myself. "He's got a very fine cloak, the Prince has," the proprietor broke in upon our deliberation. "Yes, I know," said Saint-Loup. I wanted to tell Robert that M. de Charlus had disclaimed all knowledge of me to his sister-in-law, and to ask him what could be the reason of this, but was prevented by the arrival of M. de Foix. Come to see whether his request had been favourably received, we caught sight of him standing beside our table. Robert introduced us, but did not hide from his friend that as we had things to talk about he would prefer not to be disturbed. The Prince withdrew, adding to the farewell bow which he made me a smile which, pointed at Saint-Loup, seemed to transfer to him the responsibility for the shortness of a meeting which the Prince himself would have liked to see prolonged. As he turned to go, Robert, struck, it appeared, by a sudden idea, dashed off after his friend, with a "Stay where you are and get on with your dinner, I shall be back in a moment," to me; and vanished into the smaller room. I was pained to hear the smart young men sitting near me, whom I did not know, repeat the most absurd and malicious stories about the young Hereditary Grand Duke of Luxembourg (formerly Comte de Nassau) whom I had met at Balbec and who had shewn me such delicate marks of sympathy at the time of my grandmother's illness. According to one of these young men, he had said to the Duchesse de Guermantes: "I expect everyone to get up when my wife passes," to which the Duchess had retorted (with as little truth, had she said any such thing, as humour, the grandmother of the young Princess having always been the very pink of propriety): "Get up when your wife passes, do they? Well, that's a change from her grandmother's day. She expected the gentlemen to lie down." Then some one alleged that, having gone down to see his aunt the Princesse de Luxembourg at Balbec, and put up at the Grand Hotel, he had complained to the manager there (my friend) that the royal standard of Luxembourg was not flown in front of the hotel, over the sea. And that this flag being less familiar and less generally in use than the British or Italian, it had taken him several days to procure one, greatly to the young Grand Duke's annoyance. I did not believe a word of this story, but made up my mind, as soon as I went to Balbec, to inquire of the manager, so as to make certain that it was a pure invention. While waiting for Saint-Loup to return I asked the proprietor to get me some bread. "Certainly, Monsieur le Baron!" "I am not a Baron," I told him. "Oh, beg pardon, Monsieur le Comte!" I had no time to lodge a second protest which would certainly have promoted me to the rank of marquis; faithful to his promise of an immediate return, Saint-Loup reappeared in the doorway carrying over his arm the thick vicuna cloak of the Prince de Foix, from whom I guessed that he had borrowed it in order to keep me warm. He signed to me not to get up, and came towards me, but either my table would have to be moved again or I must change my seat if he was to get to his. Entering the big room he sprang lightly on to one of the red plush benches which ran round its walls and on which, apart from myself, there were sitting only three or four of the young men from the Jockey Club, friends of his own, who had not managed to find places in the other room. Between the tables and the wall electric wires were stretched at a certain height; without the least hesitation Saint-Loup jumped nimbly over them like a horse in a steeplechase; embarrassed that it should be done wholly for my benefit and to save me the trouble of a slight movement, I was at the same time amazed at the precision with which my friend performed this exercise in levitation; and in this I was not alone; for, albeit they would probably have had but little admiration for a similar display on the part of a more humbly born and less generous client, the proprietor and his staff stood fascinated, like race-goers in the enclosure; one underling, apparently rooted to the ground, stood there gaping with a dish in his hand for which a party close beside him were waiting; and when Saint-Loup, having to get past his friends, climbed on the narrow ledge behind them and ran along it, balancing himself with his arms, discreet applause broke from the body of the room. On coming to where I was sitting he stopped short in his advance with the precision of a tributary chieftain before the throne of a sovereign, and, stooping down, handed to me with an air of courtesy and submission the vicuna cloak which, a moment later, having taken his place beside me, without my having to make a single movement he arranged as a light but warm shawl about my shoulders.

"By the way, while I think of it, my uncle Charlus has something to say to you. I promised I'd send you round to him to-morrow evening."

"I was just going to speak to you about him. But to-morrow evening I am dining with your aunt Guermantes."

"Yes there's a regular beanfeast to-morrow at Oriane's. I'm not asked. But my uncle Palamède doesn't want you to go there. You can't get out of it, I suppose? Well, anyhow, go on to my uncle's afterwards. I'm sure he really does want to see you. Look here, you can easily manage to get there by eleven. Eleven o'clock; don't forget; I'll let him know. He's very touchy. If you don't turn up he'll never forgive you. And Oriane's parties are always over quite early. If you are only going to dine there you can quite easily be at my uncle's by eleven. I ought really to go and see Oriane, about getting shifted from Morocco; I want an exchange. She is so nice about all that sort of thing, and she can get anything she likes out of General de Saint-Joseph, who runs that branch. But don't say anything about it to her. I've mentioned it to the Princesse de Parme, everything will be all right. Interesting place, Morocco. I could tell you all sorts of things. Very fine lot of men out there. One feels they're on one's own level, mentally."

"You don't think the Germans are going to go to war about it?"

"No; they're annoyed with us, as after all they have every right to be. But the Emperor is out for peace. They are always making us think they want war, to force us to give in. Pure bluff, you know, like poker. The Prince of Monaco, one of Wilhelm's agents, comes and tells us in confidence that Germany will attack us. Then we give way. But if we didn't give way, there wouldn't be war in any shape or form. You have only to think what a comic spectacle a war would be in these days. It'd be a bigger catastrophe than the Flood and the *Götterdämmerung* rolled in one. Only it wouldn't last so long."

He spoke to me of friendship, affection, regret, albeit like all visitors of his sort he was going off the next morning for some months, which he was to spend in the country, and would only be staying a couple of nights in Paris on his way back to Morocco (or elsewhere); but the words which he thus let fall into the heated furnace which my heart was this evening kindled a pleasant glow there. Our infrequent meetings, this one in particular, have since formed a distinct episode in my memories. For him, as for me, this was the evening of friendship. And yet the friendship that I felt for him at this moment was scarcely, I feared (and felt therefore some remorse at the thought), what he would have liked to inspire. Filled still with the pleasure that I had had in seeing him come bounding towards me and gracefully pause on arriving at his goal, I felt that this pleasure lay in my recognising that each of the series of movements which he had developed against the wall, along the bench, had its meaning, its cause in Saint-Loup's own personal nature, possibly, but even more in that which by birth and upbringing he had inherited from his race.

A certainty of taste in the region not of beauty but manners, which when he was faced by a novel combination of circumstances enabled the man of breeding to grasp at once—like a musician who has been asked to play a piece he has never seen—the feeling, the motions that were required, and to apply the appropriate mechanism and technique; which then allowed this taste to display itself without the constraint of any other consideration, by which the average young man of the middle class would have been paralysed, from fear as well of making himself ridiculous in the eyes of strangers by his disregard of convention as of appearing too deferential in the eyes of his friends; the place of this constraint being taken in Robert by a lofty disdain which certainly he had never felt in his heart but which he had received by inheritance in his body, and which had moulded the attitudes of his ancestors to a familiarity with their inferiors which, they imagined, could only flatter and enchant those to whom it was displayed; lastly, a noble liberality which, taking no account of his boundless natural advantages (lavish expenditure in this restaurant had succeeded in making him, here as elsewhere, the most fashionable customer and the general favourite, a position which was underlined by the deference shewn him throughout the place not only by the waiters but by all its most exclusive young patrons), led him to trample them underfoot, just as he had, actually and symbolically, trodden upon those benches decked with purple, like a triumphal way which pleased my friend only because it enabled him more gracefully and swiftly to arrive at my side; such were the qualities, essential to aristocracy, which through the husk of this body, not opaque and vague as mine would have been, but significant and limpid, transmitted as through a work of art the industrious, energetic force which had created it and rendered the movements of this lightfoot course which Robert had pursued along the wall intelligible and charming as those of a row of knights upon a marble frieze. "Alas!" Robert might have thought, "was it worth while to have grown up despising birth, honouring only justice and intellect, choosing outside the ranks of the friends provided for me companions who were awkward and ill-dressed, provided they had the gift of eloquence, only for the sole personality apparent in me, which is to remain a treasured memory, to be not that which my will, with the most praiseworthy effort, has fashioned in my likeness, but one which is not of my making, which is not even myself, which I have always disliked and striven to overcome; was it worth while to love my chosen friend as I have loved him, for the greatest pleasure that he can find in me to be that of discovering something far more general than myself, a pleasure which is not in the least (as he says, though he cannot seriously believe it) one of the pleasures of friendship, but an intellectual and detached, a sort of artistic pleasure?" This is what I am now afraid that Saint-Loup may at times have thought. If so, he was mistaken. If he had not (as he steadfastly had) cherished something more lofty than the suppleness innate in his body, if he had not kept aloof for so long from the pride that goes with noble birth, there would have been something more studied, a certain heaviness in his very agility, a self-important vulgarity in his manners. As with Mme. de Villeparisis a strong vein of seriousness had been necessary for her to give in her conversation and in her Memoirs a sense of the frivolous, which is intellectual, so, in order that Saint-Loup's body might be indwelt by so much nobility, the latter had first to desert a mind that was aiming at higher things, and, reabsorbed into his body, to be fixed there in unconscious, noble lines. In this way his distinction of mind was not absent from a bodily distinction which otherwise would not have been complete. An artist has no need to express his mind directly in his work for it to express the quality of that mind; it has indeed been said that the highest praise of God consists in the denial of Him by the atheist, who finds creation so perfect that it can dispense with a creator. And I was quite well aware that it was not merely a work of art that I was admiring in this young man unfolding along the wall the frieze of his flying course; the young Prince (a descendant of Catherine de Foix, Queen of Navarre and grand-daughter of Charles VII) whom he had just left for my sake, the endowments, by birth and fortune, which he was laying at my feet, the proud and shapely ancestors who survived in the assurance, the agility, the courtesy with which he now arranged about my shivering body the warm woollen cloak, were not all these like friends of longer standing in his life, by whom I might have expected that we should be permanently kept apart, and whom, on the contrary, he was sacrificing to me by a choice which one can make only in the loftiest places of the mind, with that sovereign liberty of which Robert's movements were the presentment and in which is realised perfect friendship?

How much familiar intercourse with a Guermantes—in place of the distinction that it had in Robert, because there the inherited scorn of humanity was but the outer garment, become an unconscious charm, of a real moral humility—could disclose of vulgar arrogance I had had an opportunity of seeing, not in M. de Charlus, in whom certain characteristic faults, for which I had been unable, so far, to account, were overlaid upon his aristocratic habits, but in the Duc de Guermantes. And yet he too, in the general impression of commonness which had so strongly repelled my grandmother when she had met him once, years earlier, at Mme. de Villeparisis's, included glimpses of historic grandeur of which I became conscious when I went to dine in his house, on the evening following that which I had spent with Saint-Loup.

They had not been apparent to me either in himself or in the Duchess when I had met them first in their aunt's drawing-room, any more than I had discerned, on first seeing her, the differences that set Berma apart from her fellow-players, all the more that in her the individuality was infinitely more striking than in any social celebrity, such distinctions becoming more marked in proportion as the objects are more real, more conceivable by the intellect. And yet, however slight the shades of social distinction may be (and so slight are they that when an accurate portrayer like Sainte-Beuve tries to indicate the shades of difference between the salons of Mme. Geoffrin, Mme. Récamier and Mme. de Boigne, they appear so much alike that the cardinal truth which, unknown to the author, emerges from his investigations is the vacuity of that form of life), with them, and for the same reason as with Berma, when the Guermantes had ceased to impress me and the tiny drop of their originality was no longer vaporised by my imagination, I was able to distil and analyse it, imponderable as it was.

The Duchess having made no reference to her husband when she talked to me at her aunt's party, I wondered whether, in view of the rumours of a divorce that were current, he would be present at the dinner. But my doubts were speedily set at rest, for through the crowd of footmen who stood about in the hall and who (since they must until then have regarded me much as they regarded the children of the evicted cabinet-maker, that is to say with more fellow-feeling perhaps than their master but as a person incapable of being admitted to his house) must have been asking themselves to what this social revolution could be due, I saw slip towards me M. de Guermantes himself, who had been watching for my arrival so as to receive me upon his threshold and take off my greatcoat with his own hands.

"Mme. de Guermantes will be as pleased as punch," he greeted me in a glibly persuasive tone. "Let me help you off with your duds." (He felt it to be at once companionable and comic to employ the speech of the people.) "My wife was just the least bit afraid you might fail us, although you had fixed a date. We've been saying to each other all day long: 'Depend upon it, he'll never turn up.' I am bound to say, Mme. de Guermantes was a better prophet than I was. You are not an easy man to get hold of, and I was quite sure you were going to play us false." And the Duke was so bad a husband, so brutal even (people said), that one felt grateful to him, as one feels grateful to wicked people for their occasional kindness of heart, for those words 'Mme. de Guermantes' with which he appeared to be spreading out over the Duchess a protecting wing, that she might be but one flesh with him. Meanwhile, taking me familiarly by the hand, he began to lead the way, to introduce me into his household. Just as some casual phrase may delight us coming from the lips of a peasant if it points to the survival of a local tradition, shews the trace of some historic event unknown, it may be, to him who thus alludes to it; so this politeness on the part of M. de Guermantes, which, moreover, he was to continue to shew me throughout the evening, charmed me as a survival of habits of many centuries' growth, habits of the seventeenth century in particular. The people of bygone ages seem to us infinitely remote. We do not feel justified in ascribing to them any underlying intention apart from those to which they give formal expression; we are amazed when we come upon a sentiment more or less akin to what we are feeling to-day in a Homeric hero, or upon a skilful tactical feint in Hannibal, during the battle of Cannae, where he let his flank be driven back in order to take the enemy by surprise and surround him; it would seem that we imagined the epic poet and the Punic general as being as remote from ourselves as an animal seen in a zoological garden. Even in certain personages of the court of Louis XIV, when we find signs of courtesy in the letters written by them to some man of inferior rank who could be of no service to them whatever, they leave us bewildered because they reveal to us suddenly, as existing among these great gentlemen, a whole world of beliefs to which they never give any direct expression but which govern their conduct, and especially the belief that they are bound in politeness to feign certain sentiments and to carry out with the most scrupulous care certain obligations of friendship.

This imagined remoteness of the past is perhaps one of the things that enable us to understand how even great writers have found an inspired beauty in the works of mediocre mystifiers, such as Macpherson's *Ossian*.

We so little expected to learn that bards long dead could have modern ideas that we marvel if in what we believe to be an ancient Gaelic ode we come upon one which we should have thought, at the most, ingenious in a contemporary. A translator of talent has simply to add to an ancient writer whom he presents to us more or less faithfully reproduced fragments which, signed with a contemporary name and published separately, would seem entertaining only; at once he imparts a moving grandeur to his poet, who is thus made to play upon the keyboards of several ages at once. This translator was capable only of a mediocre book, if that book had been published as his original work. Given out as a translation, it seems that of a masterpiece. The past not merely is not fugitive, it remains present. It is not within a few months only after the outbreak of a war that laws passed without haste can effectively influence its course, it is not within fifteen years only after a crime which has remained obscure that a magistrate can still find the vital evidence which will throw a light on it; after hundreds and thousands of years the scholar who has been studying in a distant land the place-names, the customs of the inhabitants, may still extract from them some legend long anterior to the Christian era, already unintelligible, if not actually forgotten, at the time of Herodotus, which in the name given to a rock, in a religious rite, dwells surrounded by the present, like an emanation of greater density, immemorial and stable. There was similarly an emanation, though far less ancient, of the life of the court, if not in the manners of M. de Guermantes, which were often vulgar, at least in the mind that controlled them. I was to breathe this again, like the odour of antiquity, when I joined him a little later in the drawing-room. For I did not go there at once.

As we left the outer hall, I had mentioned to M. de Guermantes that I was extremely anxious to see his Elstirs. "I am at your service. Is M. Elstir a friend of yours, then? If so, it is most vexing, for I know him slightly; he is a pleasant fellow, what our fathers used to call an 'honest fellow'; I might have asked him to honour us with his company, and to dine to-night. I am sure he would have been highly flattered at being invited to spend the evening in your society." Very little suggestive of the old order when he tried thus to assume its manner, the Duke relapsed unconsciously into it. After inquiring whether I wished him to shew me the pictures, he conducted me to them, gracefully standing aside for me at each door, apologising when, to shew me the way, he was obliged to precede me, a little scene which (since the days when Saint-Simon relates that an ancestor of the Guermantes did him the honours of his town house with the same punctilious exactitude in the performance of the frivolous duties of a gentleman) must, before coming gradually down to us, have been enacted by many other Guermantes for numberless other visitors. And as I had said to the Duke that I would like very much to be left alone for a few minutes with the pictures, he discreetly withdrew, telling me that I should find him in the drawing-room when I was ready.

Only, once I was face to face with the Elstirs, I completely forgot about dinner and the time; here again as at Balbec I had before me fragments of that strangely coloured world which was no more than the projection, the way of seeing things peculiar to that great painter, which his speech in no way expressed. The parts of the walls that were covered by paintings from his brush, all homogeneous with one another, were like the luminous images of a magic lantern, which would have been in this instance the brain of the artist, and the strangeness of which one could never have suspected so long as one had known only the man, which was like seeing the iron lantern boxing its lamp before any coloured slide had been slid into its groove. Among these pictures several of the kind that seemed most absurd to ordinary people interested me more than the rest because they recreated those optical illusions which prove to us that we should never succeed in identifying objects if we did not make some process of reasoning intervene. How often, when driving in the dark, do we not come upon a long, lighted street which begins a few feet away from us, when what we have actually before our eyes is nothing but a rectangular patch of wall with a bright light falling on it, which has given us the mirage of depth. In view of which is it not logical, not by any artifice of symbolism but by a sincere return to the very root of the impression, to represent one thing by that other for which, in the flash of a first illusion, we mistook it? Surfaces and volumes are in reality independent of the names of objects which our memory imposes on them after we have recognised them. Elstir attempted to wrest from what he had just felt what he already knew, his effort had often been to break up that aggregate of impressions which we call vision.

The people who detested these 'horrors' were astonished to find that Elstir admired Chardin, Perroneau, any number of painters whom they, the ordinary men and women of society, liked. They did not take into account that Elstir had had to make, for his own part, in striving to reproduce reality (with the particular index of his taste for certain lines of approach), the same effort as a Chardin or a Perroneau and that consequently, when he ceased to work for himself, he admired in them attempts of the same order, fragments anticipatory so to speak of works of his own. Nor did these society people include in their conception of Elstir's work that temporal perspective which enabled them to like, or at least to look without discomfort at Chardin's painting. And yet the older among them might have reminded themselves that in the course of their lives they had seen gradually, as the years bore them away from it, the unbridgeable gulf between what they considered a masterpiece by Ingres and what, they had supposed, must remain for ever a 'horror' (Manet's *Olympia,* for example) shrink until the two canvases seemed like twins. But we learn nothing from any lesson because we have not the wisdom to work backwards from the particular to the general, and imagine ourselves always to be going through an experience which is without precedents in the past.

I was moved by the discovery in two of the pictures (more realistic, these, and in an earlier manner) of the same person, in one in evening dress in his own drawing-room, in the other wearing a frock coat and tall hat at some popular regatta where he had evidently no business to be, which proved that for Elstir he was not only a regular sitter but a friend, perhaps a patron whom it pleased him (just as Carpaccio used to introduce prominent figures, and in speaking likenesses, from contemporary life in Venice) to introduce into his pictures, just as Beethoven, too, found pleasure in inscribing at the top of a favourite work the beloved name of the Archduke Rudolph. There was something enchanting about this waterside carnival. The river, the women's dresses, the sails of the boats, the innumerable reflexions of one thing and another came crowding into this little square panel of beauty which Elstir had cut out of a marvellous afternoon. What delighted one in the dress of a woman who had stopped for a moment in the dance because it was hot and she was out of breath was irresistible also in the same way in the canvas of a motionless sail, in the water of the little harbour, in the wooden bridge, in the leaves of the trees and in the sky. As in one of the pictures that I had seen at Balbec, the hospital, as beautiful beneath its sky of lapis lazuli as the cathedral itself, seemed (more bold than Elstir the theorician, then Elstir the man of taste, the lover of things mediaeval) to be intoning: "There is no such thing as gothic, there is no such thing as a masterpiece; this tasteless hospital is just as good as the glorious porch," so I now heard: "The slightly vulgar lady at whom a man of discernment would refrain from glancing as he passed her by, would except from the poetical composition which nature has set before him—her dress is receiving the same light as the sail of that boat, and there are no degrees of value and beauty; the commonplace dress and the sail, beautiful in itself, are two mirrors reflecting the same gleam; the value is all in the painter's eye." This eye had had the skill to arrest for all time the motion of the hours at this luminous instant, when the lady had felt hot and had stopped dancing, when the tree was fringed with a belt of shadow, when the sails seemed to be slipping over a golden glaze. But just because the depicted moment pressed on one with so much force, this so permanent canvas gave one the most fleeting impression, one felt that the lady would presently move out of it, the boats drift away, the night draw on, that pleasure comes to an end, that life passes and that the moments illuminated by the convergence, at once, of so many lights do not recur. I recognized yet another aspect, quite different it is true, of what the moment means in a series of water-colours of mythological subjects, dating from Elstir's first period, which also adorned this room. Society people who held 'advanced' views on art went 'as far as' this earliest manner, but no further. These were certainly not the best work that he had done, but already the sincerity with which the subject had been thought out melted its natural coldness. Thus the Muses, for instance, were represented as it might be creatures belonging to a species now fossilised, but creatures which it would not have been surprising in mythological times to see pass in the evening, in twos or threes, along some mountain path. Here and there a poet, of a race that had also a peculiar interest for the zoologist (characterised by a certain sexlessness) strolled with a Muse, as one sees in nature creatures of different but of kindred species consort together. In one of these water-colours one saw a poet wearied by long wanderings on the mountains, whom a Centaur, meeting him and moved to pity by his weakness, had taken on his back and was carrying home. In more than one other, the vast landscape (in which the mythical scene, the fabulous heroes, occupied a minute place and were almost lost) was rendered, from the mountain tops to the sea, with an exactitude which told one more than the hour, told one to the very minute what time of day it was, thanks to the precise angle of the setting sun, to the fleeting fidelity of the shadows. In this way the artist managed to give, by making it instantaneous, a sort of historical reality, as of a thing actually lived, to the symbol of his fable, painted it and set it at a definite point in the past.

While I was examining Elstir's paintings the bell, rung by arriving guests, had been pealing uninterruptedly, and had lulled me into a pleasing unconsciousness. But the silence which followed its clangour and had already lasted for some time succeeded—less rapidly, it is true—in awakening me from my dream, as the silence that follows Lindor's music arouses Bartolo from his sleep. I was afraid that I had been forgotten, that they had sat down to dinner, and hurried to the drawing-room. At the door of the Elstir gallery I found a servant waiting for me, white-haired, though whether with age or powder I cannot say, with the air of a Spanish Minister, but treating me with the same respect that he would have shewn to a King. I felt from his manner that he must have been waiting for at least an hour, and I thought with alarm of the delay I had caused in the service of dinner, especially as I had promised to be at M. de Charlus's by eleven.

The Spanish Minister (though I also met on the way the footman persecuted by the porter, who, radiant with delight when I inquired after his girl, told me that the very next day they were both to be off duty, so that he would be able to spend the whole day with her, and extolled the generosity of Madame la Duchesse) conducted me to the drawing-room, where I was afraid of finding M. de Guermantes in an ill humour. He welcomed me, on the contrary, with a joy that was evidently to a certain extent artificial and dictated by politeness, but was also sincere, prompted both by his stomach which so long a delay had begun to famish, and his consciousness of a similar impatience in all his other guests, who completely filled the room. Indeed I heard afterwards that I had kept them waiting for nearly three-quarters of an hour. The Duc de Guermantes probably thought that to prolong the general torment for two minutes more would not intensify it and that, politeness having driven him to postpone for so long the moment of moving into the dining-room, this politeness would be more complete if, by not having dinner announced immediately, he could succeed in persuading me that I was not late, and that they had not been waiting for me. And so he asked me, as if we had still an hour before dinner and some of the party had not yet arrived, what I thought of his Elstirs. But at the same time, and without letting the cravings of his stomach become apparent, so as not to lose another moment, he, in concert with the Duchess, proceeded to the ceremony of introduction. Then only I perceived that there had occurred round about me, me who until this evening, save for my novitiate in Mme. Swann's drawing-room, had been accustomed, in my mother's homes, at Combray and in Paris, to the manners, either protecting or defensive, of the grim ladies of our middle-world, who treated me as a child, a change of surroundings comparable to that which introduces Parsifal suddenly into the midst of the Flower-Maidens. Those who surrounded me now, their bosoms entirely bare (the naked flesh appeared on either side of a sinuous spray of mimosa or behind the broad petals of a rose) could not murmur a word of greeting without at the same time bathing me in long, caressing glances, as though shyness alone restrained them from kissing me. Many of them were nevertheless highly respectable from the moral standpoint; many, not all, for the most virtuous had not for those of a lighter vein the same repulsion that my mother would have felt. The caprices of one's conduct, denied by saintlier friends, in the face of the evidence, seemed in the Guermantes world to matter far less than the relations which one had been able to maintain. One pretended not to know that the body of one's hostess was at the disposal of all comers, provided that her visiting list showed no gaps. As the Duke put himself out not at all for his other guests (of whom he had long known everything that there was to know, and they of him) but quite markedly for me, whose kind of superiority, being outside his experience, inspired in him something akin to the respect which the great nobleman of the court of Louis XIV used to feel for his plebeian Ministers, he evidently considered that the fact of my not knowing his other guests mattered not at all—to me at least, though it might to them—and while I was anxious, on his account, as to the impression that I was going to make on them he was thinking only of how his friends would impress me.

At the very outset I found myself completely bewildered. No sooner had I entered the drawing-room than M. de Guermantes, without even allowing me time to shake hands with the Duchess, had led me, as though I were a delightful surprise to the person in question to whom he seemed to be saying: "Here's your friend! You see, I'm bringing him to you by the scruff of his neck," towards a lady of smallish stature. Whereupon, long before, thrust forward by the Duke, I had reached her chair, the lady had begun to flash at me continuously from her large, soft, dark eyes the thousand smiles of understanding which we address to an old friend who perhaps has not recognised us. As this was precisely my case and I could not succeed in calling to mind who she was I averted my eyes from her as I approached so as not to have to respond until our introduction should have released me from my predicament. Meanwhile the lady continued to maintain in unstable equilibrium the smile intended for myself. She looked as though she were anxious to be relieved of it and to hear me say: "Oh, but this is a pleasure! Mamma will be pleased when I tell her I've met you!" I was as impatient to learn her name as she was to see that I did finally greet her, fully aware of what I was doing, so that the smile which she was holding on indefinitely, like the note of a tuning-fork, might at length be let go. But M. de Guermantes managed things so badly (to my mind, at least) that I seemed to have heard only my own name uttered and was given no clue to the identity of my unknown friend, to whom it never occurred to tell me herself what her name was, so obvious did the grounds of our intimacy, which baffled me completely, seem to her. Indeed, as soon as I had come within reach, she did not offer me her hand, but took mine in a familiar clasp, and spoke to me exactly as though I had been equally conscious with herself of the pleasant memories to which her mind reverted. She told me how sorry Albert (who, I gathered, was her son) would be to have missed seeing me. I tried to remember who, among the people I had known as boys, was called Albert, and could think only of Bloch, but this could not be Bloch's mother that I saw before me since she had been dead for some time. In vain I struggled to identify the past experience common to herself and me to which her thoughts had been carried back. But I could no more distinguish it through the translucent jet of her large, soft pupils which allowed only her smile to pierce their surface than one can distinguish a landscape that lies on the other side of a smoked glass, even when the sun is blazing on it. She asked me whether my father was not working too hard, if I would not come to the theatre some evening with Albert, if I was stronger now, and as my replies, stumbling through the mental darkness in which I was plunged, became distinct only to explain that I was not feeling well that evening, she pushed forward a chair for me herself, going to all sorts of trouble which I was not accustomed to see taken by my parents' friends. At length the clue to the riddle was furnished me by the Duke: "She thinks you're charming," he murmured in my ear, which felt somehow that it had heard these words before. They were what Mme. de Villeparisis had said to my grandmother and myself after we had made the acquaintance of the Princesse de Luxembourg. Everything became clear; the lady I now saw had nothing in common with Mme. de Luxembourg, but from the language of him who thus served me with her I could discern the nature of the animal. It was a Royalty. She had never before heard of either my family or myself, but, a scion of the noblest race and endowed with the greatest fortune in the world (for, a daughter of the Prince de Parme, she had married a cousin of equal princelihood), she sought always, in gratitude to her Creator, to testify to her neighbour, however poor or lowly he might be, that she did not look down upon him. Really, I might have guessed this from her smile. I had seen the Princesse de Luxembourg buy little rye-cakes on the beach at Balbec to give to my grandmother, as though to a caged deer in the zoological garden. But this was only the second Princess of the Blood Royal to whom I had been presented, and I might be excused my failure to discern in her the common factors of the friendliness of the great. Besides, had not they themselves gone out of their way to warn me not to count too much on this friendliness, since the Duchesse de Guermantes, who had waved me so effusive a greeting with her gloved hand at the Opéra-Comique, had appeared furious when I bowed to her in the street, like people who, having once given somebody a sovereign, feel that this has set them free from any further obligation toward him. As for M. de Charlus, his ups and downs were even more sharply contrasted. While in the sequel I have known, as the reader will learn, Highnesses and Majesties of another sort altogether, Queens who play the Queen and speak not after the conventions of their kind but like the Queens in Sardou's plays.

If M. de Guermantes had been in such haste to present me, it was because the presence at a party of anyone not personally known to a Royal Personage is an intolerable state of things which must not be prolonged for a single instant. It was similar to the haste which Saint-Loup had shewn in making me introduce him to my grandmother. By the same token, by a fragmentary survival of the old life of the court which is called social courtesy and is not superficial, in which, rather, by a centripetal reversion, it is the surface that becomes essential and profound, the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes regarded as a duty more essential than those (which one at least of the pair neglected often enough) of charity, chastity, pity and justice, as a more unalterable law that of never addressing the Princesse de Parme save in the third person.

Having never yet in my life been to Parma (a pilgrimage I had been anxious to make ever since certain Easter holidays long ago), to meet its Princess, who, I knew, owned the finest palace in that matchless city, where, moreover, everything must be in keeping, isolated as it was from the rest of the world, within the polished walls, in the atmosphere, stifling as a breathless summer evening on the Piazza of a small town in Italy, of its compact and almost cloying name, would surely have substituted in a flash for what I had so often tried to imagine all that did really exist at Parma in a sort of partial arrival there, without my having to stir from Paris, of myself; it was in the algebraical expression of a journey to the city of Correggio a simple equation, so to speak, of that unknown quantity. But if I had for many years past—like a perfumer impregnating a solid mass of grease with scent—made this name, Princesse de Parme, absorb the fragrance of thousands of violets, in return, when I set eyes on the Princess, who, until then I should have sworn, must be the Sanseverina herself, a second process began which was not, I may say, completed until several months had passed, and consisted in expelling, by means of fresh chemical combinations, all the essential oil of violets and all the Stendhalian fragrance from the name of the Princess, and in implanting there, in their place, the image of a little dark woman, taken up with good works, of a friendliness so humble that one felt at once in how exalted a pride that friendliness had its roots. Moreover, while, barring a few points of difference, she was exactly like any other great lady, she was as little Stendhalian as is, for example, in Paris, in the Europe quarter, the Rue de Parme, which bears far less resemblance to the name of Parma than to any or all of the neighbouring streets, and reminds one not nearly so much of the Charterhouse in which Fabrice ends his days as of the waiting room in the Saint-Lazare station.

Her friendliness sprang from two causes. The first and more general was the education which this daughter of Kings had received. Her mother (not merely allied by blood to all the royal families of Europe but furthermore—in contrast to the Ducal House of Parma—richer than any reigning Princess) had instilled into her from her earliest childhood the arrogantly humble precepts of an evangelical snobbery; and to-day every line of the daughter's face, the curve of her shoulders, the movements of her arms seemed to repeat the lesson: "Remember that if God has caused you to be born on the steps of a throne you ought not to make that a reason for looking down upon those to whom Divine Providence has willed (wherefore His Name be praised) that you should be superior by birth and fortune. On the contrary, you must suffer the little ones. Your ancestors were Princes of Treves and Juliers from the year 647: God has decreed in His bounty that you should hold practically all the shares in the Suez Canal and three times as many Royal Dutch as Edmond de Rothschild; your pedigree in a direct line has been established by genealogists from the year 63 of the Christian Era; you have as sisters-in-law two Empresses. Therefore never seem, in your speech, to be recalling these great privileges, not that they are precarious (for nothing can alter antiquity of race, while the world will always need petrol), but because it is useless to point out that you are better born than other people or that your investments are all gilt-edged, since everyone knows these facts already. Be helpful to the needy. Furnish to all those whom the bounty of Heaven has done you the favour of placing beneath you as much as you can give them without forfeiture of your rank, that is to say help in the form of money, even your personal service by their sickbeds, but never (bear well in mind) invite them to your parties, which would do them no possible good and, by weakening your own position, would diminish the efficacy of your benevolent activities."

And so even at the moments when she could not do good the Princess endeavoured to shew, or rather to let it be thought, by all the external signs of dumb language, that she did not consider herself superior to the people among whom she found herself thrown. She treated each of them with that charming courtesy with which well-bred people treat their inferiors and was continually, to make herself useful, pushing back her chair so as to leave more room, holding my gloves, offering me all those services which would demean the proud spirit of a commoner but are very willingly rendered by sovereign ladies or, instinctively and by force of professional habit, by retired servants.

But already the Duke, who seemed in a hurry to complete the round of introduction, had led me off to another of the flower-maidens. On hearing her name I told her that I had passed by her country house, not far from Balbec. "Oh, I should have been so pleased to take you over it," she informed me, almost in a whisper, to enhance her modesty, but in a tone of deep feeling, steeped in regret for the loss of an opportunity to enjoy a quite exceptional pleasure; and went on, with a meaning glance: "I do hope you will come again some day. But I must say that what would interest you more still would be my aunt Brancas's place. It was built by Mansard; it is the jewel of the province." It was not only she herself who would have been glad to shew me over her house, but her aunt Brancas would have been no less delighted to do me the honours of hers, or so I was assured by this lady who thought evidently that, especially at a time when the land shewed a tendency to pass into the hands of financiers who had no knowledge of the world, it was important that the great should keep up the exalted traditions of lordly hospitality, by speeches which involved them in nothing. It was also because she sought, like everyone in her world, to say the things which would give most pleasure to the person she was addressing, to give him the highest idea of himself, to make him think that he flattered people by writing to them, that he honoured those who entertained him, that everyone was burning to know him. The desire to give other people this comforting idea of themselves does, it must be admitted, exist even among the middle classes. We find there that kindly disposition, in the form of an individual merit compensating for some other defect, not alas among the most trusty male friends but at any rate among the most agreeable female companions. But there anyhow it blooms only in isolated patches. In an important section of the aristocracy, on the other hand, this characteristic has ceased to be individual; cultivated by education, sustained by the idea of a personal greatness which can fear no humiliation, which knows no rival, is aware that by being pleasant it can make people happy and delights in doing so, it has become the generic feature of a class. And even those whom personal defects of too incompatible a kind prevent from keeping it in their hearts bear the unconscious trace of it in their vocabulary or their gesticulation.

"She is a very good creature," said the Duc de Guermantes, of the Princesse de Parme, "and she can play the 'great lady' when she likes, better than anyone."

While I was being introduced to the ladies, one of the gentlemen of the party had been shewing various signs of agitation: this was Comte Hannibal de Bréauté-Consalvi. Arriving late, he had not had time to investigate the composition of the party, and when I entered the room, seeing in me a guest who was not one of the Duchess's regular circle and must therefore have some quite extraordinary claim to admission, installed his monocle beneath the groined arch of his eyebrow, thinking that this would be a great help to him in discovering what manner of man I was. He knew that Mme. de Guermantes possessed (the priceless appanage of truly superior women) what was called a 'salon,' that is to say added occasionally to the people of her own set some celebrity who had recently come into prominence by the discovery of a new cure for something or the production of a masterpiece. The Faubourg Saint-Germain had not yet recovered from the shock of learning that, to the reception which she had given to meet the King and Queen of England, the Duchess had not been afraid to invite M. Detaille. The clever women of the Faubourg who had not been invited were inconsolable, so deliciously thrilling would it have been to come into contact with that strange genius. Mme. de Courvoisier made out that M. Ribot had been there as well, but this was a pure invention, designed to make people believe that Oriane was aiming at an Embassy for her husband. Finally, a last straw of scandal, M. de Guermantes, with a gallantry that would have done credit to Marshal Saxe, had repaired to the green-room of the Comédie Française, and had begged Mlle. Reichemberg to come and recite before the King, which having come to pass constituted an event without precedent in the annals of routs. Remembering all these surprises, which, moreover, had his entire approval, his own presence being not merely an ornament but, in the same way as that of the Duchesse de Guermantes, a consecration to any drawing-room, M. de Bréauté, when he asked himself who I could be, felt that the field of exploration was very wide. For a moment the name of M. Widor flashed before his mind, but he decided that I was not old enough to be an organist, and M. Widor not striking enough to be 'asked out.' It seemed on the whole more plausible to regard me simply as the new Attaché at the Swedish Legation of whom he had heard, and he was preparing to ask me for the latest news of King Oscar, by whom he had several times been very hospitably received; but when the Duke, in introducing me, had mentioned my name to M. de Bréauté, the latter, finding that name to be completely unknown to him, had no longer any doubt that, being where I was, I must be a celebrity of some sort. Oriane would certainly never invite anyone who was not, and had the art of attracting men who were in the public eye to her house, in a ratio that of course never exceeded one per cent, otherwise she would have lowered its tone. M. de Bréauté began, therefore, to lick his chops and to sniff the air greedily, his appetite whetted not only by the good dinner upon which he could count, but by the character of the party, which my presence could not fail to make interesting, and which would furnish him with a topic for brilliant conversation next day at the Duc de Chartres's luncheon-table. He had not yet settled in his own mind whether I was the man who had just been making those experiments with a serum to cure cancer, or the author of the new 'curtain-raiser' then in rehearsal at the Théâtre Français; but, a great intellectual, a great collector of 'travellers' tales,' he continued an ever increasing display of reverences, signs of mutual understanding, smiles filtered through the glass of his monocle; either in the mistaken idea that a man of my standing would esteem him more highly if he could manage to instil into me the illusion that for him, the Comte de Bréauté-Consalvi, the privileges of the mind were no less deserving of respect than those of birth; or simply from the need to express and difficulty of expressing his satisfaction, in his ignorance of the language in which he ought to address me, just as if, in fact, he had found himself face to face with one of the 'natives' of an undiscovered country on which his keel had grounded, natives from whom, in the hope of ultimate profit, he would endeavour, observing with interest the while their quaint customs and without interrupting his demonstrations of friendship, or like them uttering loud cries, to obtain ostrich eggs and spices in exchange for his glass beads. Having responded as best I could to his joy, I shook hands next with the Duc de Châtellerault, whom I had already met at Mme. de Villeparisis's, who, he informed me, was as 'cunning as they made 'em.' He was typically Guermantes in the fairness of his hair, his arched profile, the points where the skin of his cheeks lost colour, all of which may be seen in the portraits of that family which have come down to us from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But, as I was no longer in love with the Duchess, her reincarnation in the person of a young man offered me no attraction. I interpreted the hook made by the Duc de Châtellerault's nose, as if it had been the signature of a painter whose work I had long studied but who no longer interested me in the least. Next, I said good evening also to the Prince de Foix, and to the detriment of my knuckles, which emerged crushed and mangled, let them be caught in a vice which was the German handclasp, accompanied by an ironical or good-natured smile, of the Prince von Faffenheim, M. de Norpois's friend, who, by virtue of the mania for nicknames which prevailed in this set, was known so universally as Prince Von that he himself used to sign his letters 'Prince Von,' or, when he wrote to his intimates, 'Von.' And yet this abbreviation was understandable, in view of his triple-barrelled name. It was less easy to grasp the reasons which made 'Elizabeth' be replaced, now by 'Lili,' now by 'Bebeth,' just as another world swarmed with 'Kikis.' One can realise that these people, albeit in most respects idle and light-minded enough, might have come to adopt 'Quiou' in order not to waste the precious time that it would have taken them to pronounce 'Montesquiou.' But it is not so easy to see what they saved by naming one of their cousins 'Dinand' instead of 'Ferdinand.' It must not be thought, however, that in the invention of nicknames the Guermantes invariably proceed to curtail or reduplicate syllables. Thus two sisters, the Comtesse de Montpeyroux and the Vicomtesse de Vélude, who were both of them enormously stout, invariably heard themselves addressed, without the least trace of annoyance on their part or of amusement on other people's, so long established was the custom, as 'Petite' and 'Mignonne.' Mme. de Guermantes, who adored Mme. de Montpeyroux, would, if her friend had been seriously ill, have flown to the sister with tears in her eyes and exclaimed: "I hear Petite is dreadfully bad!" Mme. de l'Eclin, who wore her hair in bands that entirely hid her ears, was never called anything but 'The Empty Stomach'; in some cases people simply added an 'a' to the last or first name of the husband to indicate the wife. The most miserly, most sordid, most inhuman man in the Faubourg having been christened Raphael, his charmer, his flower springing also from the rock always signed herself 'Raphaela'—but these are merely a few specimens taken from innumerable rules, to which we can always return later on, if the occasion offers, and explain some of them. I then asked the Duke to present me to the Prince d'Agrigente. "What! Do you mean to say you don't know our excellent Gri-gri!" cried M. de Guermantes, and gave M. d'Agrigente my name. His own, so often quoted by Françoise, had always appeared to me like a transparent sheet of coloured glass through which I beheld, struck, on the shore of the violet sea, by the slanting rays of a golden sun, the rosy marble cubes of an ancient city of which I had not the least doubt that the Prince—happening for a miraculous moment to be passing through Paris—was himself, as luminously Sicilian and gloriously mellowed, the absolute sovereign. Alas, the vulgar drone to whom I was introduced, and who wheeled round to bid me good evening with a ponderous ease which he considered elegant, was as independent of his name as of any work of art that he might have owned without bearing upon his person any trace of its beauty, without, perhaps, ever having stopped to examine it. The Prince d'Agrigente was so entirely devoid of anything princely, anything that might make one think of Girgenti that one was led to suppose that his name, entirely distinct from himself, bound by no ties to his person, had had the power of attracting to itself the whole of whatever vague poetical element there might have been in this man as in any other, and isolating it, after the operation, in the enchanted syllables. If any such operation had been performed, it had certainly been done most efficiently, for there remained not an atom of charm to be drawn from this kinsman of Guermantes. With the result that he found himself at one and the same time the only man in the world who was Prince d'Agrigente and the man who, of all the men in the world was, perhaps, least so. He was, for all that, very glad to be what he was, but as a banker is glad to hold a number of shares in a mine without caring whether the said mine answers to the charming name of Ivanhoe or Primrose, or is called merely the Premier. Meanwhile, as these introductions, which it has taken me so long to recount but which, beginning as I entered the room, had lasted only a few seconds, were coming to an end, and Mme. de Guermantes, in an almost suppliant tone, was saying to me: "I am sure Basin is tiring you, dragging you round like that; we are anxious for you to know our friends, but we are a great deal more anxious not to tire you, so that you may come again often," the Duke, with a somewhat awkward and timid wave of the hand, gave (as he would gladly have given it at any time during the last hour, filled for me by the contemplation of his Elstirs) the signal that dinner might now be served.

I should add that one of the guests was still missing, M. de Grouchy, whose wife, a Guermantes by birth, had arrived by herself, her husband being due to come straight from the country, where he had been shooting all day. This M. de Grouchy, a descendant of his namesake of the First Empire, of whom it has been said, quite wrongly, that his absence at the start of the Battle of Waterloo was the principal cause of Napoleon's defeat, came of an excellent family which, however, was not good enough in the eyes of certain fanatics for blue blood. Thus the Prince de Guermantes, whose own tastes, in later life, were to prove more easily satisfied, had been in the habit of saying to his nieces: "What a misfortune for that poor Mme. de Guermantes" (the Vicomtesse de Guermantes, Mme. de Grouchy's mother) "that she has never succeeded in marrying any of her children." "But, uncle, the eldest girl married M. de Grouchy." "I do not call that a husband! However, they say that your uncle François has proposed for the youngest one, so perhaps they won't all die old maids." No sooner was the order to serve dinner given than with a vast gyratory whirr, multiple and simultaneous, the double doors of the dining-room swung apart; a chamberlain with the air of a Lord Chamberlain bowed before the Princesse de Parme and announced the tidings "Madame is served," in a tone such as he would have employed to say "Madame is dead," which, however, cast no gloom over the assembly for it was with an air of unrestrained gaiety and as, in summer, at 'Robinson' that the couples moved forward one behind another to the dining-room, separating when they had reached their places where footmen thrust their chairs in behind them; last of all, Mme. de Guermantes advanced upon me, that I might lead her to the table, and without my feeling the least shadow of the timidity that I might have feared, for, like a huntress to whom her great muscular prowess has made graceful motion an easy thing, observing no doubt that I had placed myself on the wrong side of her, she pivoted with such accuracy round me that I found her arm resting on mine and attuned in the most natural way to a rhythm of precise and noble movements. I yielded to these with all the more readiness in that the Guermantes attached no more importance to them than does to learning a truly learned man in whose company one is less alarmed than in that of a dunce; other doors opened through which there entered the steaming soup, as though the dinner were being held in a puppet-theatre of skilful mechanism where the belated arrival of the young guest set, on a signal from the puppet-master, all the machinery in motion.

Timid and not majestically sovereign had been this signal from the Duke, to which had responded the unlocking of that vast, ingenious, subservient and sumptuous clockwork, mechanical and human. The indecision of his gesture did not spoil for me the effect of the spectacle that was attendant upon it. For I could feel that what had made it hesitating and embarrassed was the fear of letting me see that they were waiting only for myself to begin dinner and that they had been waiting for some time, just as Mme. de Guermantes was afraid that after looking at so many pictures I would find it tiring and would be hindered from taking my ease among them if her husband engaged me in a continuous flow of introductions. So that it was the absence of grandeur in this gesture that disclosed its true grandeur. As, also, did that indifference shewn by the Duke to the splendour of his surroundings, in contrast to his deference towards a guest, however insignificant, whom he desired to honour.

Not that M. de Guermantes was not in certain respects thoroughly commonplace, shewing indeed some of the absurd weaknesses of a man with too much money, the arrogance of an upstart, which he certainly was not. But just as a public official or a priest sees his own humble talents multiplied to infinity (as a wave is by the whole mass of the sea which presses behind it) by those forces on which they can rely, the Government of France and the Catholic Church, so M. de Guermantes was borne on by that other force, aristocratic courtesy in its truest form. This courtesy drew the line at any number of people. Mme. de Guermantes would not have asked to her house Mme. de Cambremer, or M. de Forcheville. But the moment that anyone (as was the case with me) appeared eligible for admission into the Guermantes world, this courtesy revealed treasures of hospitable simplicity more splendid still, were that possible, than those historic rooms, or the marvellous furniture that had remained in them.

When he wished to give pleasure to anyone, M. de Guermantes possessed, in this way, for making his guest for the moment the principal person present, an art which made the most of the circumstances and the place. No doubt at Guermantes his 'distinctions' and 'favours' would have assumed another form. He would have ordered his carriage to take me for a drive, alone with himself, before dinner. Such as they were, one could not help feeling touched by his manners as one is in reading memoirs of the period by those of Louis XIV when he replies good-naturedly, smiling and almost with a bow, to some one who has come to solicit his favour. It must however in both instances be borne in mind that this 'politeness' did not go beyond the strict meaning of the word.

Louis XIV (with whom the sticklers for pure nobility of his day find fault, nevertheless, for his scant regard for etiquette, so much so that, according to Saint-Simon, he was only a very minor king, as kings go, when compared with such monarchs as Philippe de Valois or Charles V), has the most minute instructions drawn up so that Princes of the Blood and Ambassadors may know to what sovereigns they ought to give precedence. In certain cases, in view of the impossibility of arriving at a decision, a compromise is arranged by which the son of Louis XIV, Monseigneur, shall entertain certain foreign sovereigns only out of doors, in the open air, so that it may not be said that in entering the house one has preceded the other; and the Elector Palatine, entertaining the Duc de Chevreuse at dinner, pretends, so as not to have to make way for his guest, to be taken ill, and dines with him indeed, but dines lying down, thus avoiding the difficulty. M. le Duc evading opportunities of paying his duty to Monsieur, the latter, on the advice of the King, his brother, who is moreover extremely attached to him, seizes an excuse for making his cousin attend his levee and forcing him to pass him his shirt. But as soon as the feeling is deep, when the heart is involved, this rule of duty, so inflexible when politeness only is at stake, changes entirely. A few hours after the death of his brother, one of the people whom he most dearly loved, when Monsieur, in the words of the Duc de Montfort, is 'still warm,' we find Louis XIV singing snatches from operas, astonished that the Duchesse de Bourgogne, who has difficulty in concealing her grief, should be looking so woe-begone, and, desiring that the gaiety of the court shall be at once resumed, so that his courtiers may be encouraged to sit down to the tables, ordering the Duc de Bourgogne to start a game of *brelan*. Well, not only in his social and concentrated activities, but in the most spontaneous utterances, the ordinary preoccupations of M. de Guermantes, the use he made of his time, one found a similar contrast; the Guermantes were no more susceptible than other mortals to grief; one might indeed say that their actual sensibility was lower; on the other hand one saw their names every day in the social columns of the *Gaulois* on account of the prodigious number of funerals at which they would have felt it a neglect of duty not to have their presence recorded. As the traveller discovers, almost unaltered, the houses roofed with turf, the terraces which may have met the eyes of Xenophon or Saint Paul, so in the manners of M. de Guermantes, a man who melted one's heart by his courtesy and revolted it by his harshness, I found still intact after the lapse of more than two centuries that deviation typical of court life under Louis XIV which transfers all scruples of conscience from matters of the affections and morality and applies them to purely formal questions.

The other reason for the friendliness shewn me by the Princesse de Parme was of a more personal kind. It was that she was convinced beforehand that everything that she saw at the Duchesse de Guermantes's, people and things alike, was of a quality superior to that of anything that she had at home. It is true that in all the other houses of her acquaintance she behaved as if this had been the case; over the simplest dish, the most ordinary flowers, she was not satisfied with going into ecstasies, she would ask leave to send round next morning, to copy the recipe or to examine the variety of blossom, her head cook or head gardener, gentlemen with large salaries who kept their own carriages and were deeply humiliated at having to come to inquire after a dish they despised or to take notes of a kind of carnation that was not half so fine, had not such ornamental streaks, did not produce so large a blossom as those which they had long been growing for her at home. But if in the Princess, wherever she went, this astonishment at the sight of the most commonplace things was assumed, and intended to shew that she did not derive from the superiority of her rank and riches a pride forbidden by her early instructors, habitually dissembled by her mother and intolerable in the sight of her Creator, it was, on the other hand, in all sincerity that she regarded the drawing-room of the Duchesse de Guermantes as a privileged place in which she could pass only from surprise to delight. To a certain extent, for that matter, though not nearly enough to justify this state of mind, the Guermantes were different from the rest of noble society, they were rarer and more refined. They had given me at first sight the opposite impression; I had found them vulgar, similar to all other men and women, but because before meeting them I had seen in them, as in Balbec, in Florence, in Parma, only names. Evidently, in this drawing-room, all the women whom I had imagined as being like porcelain figures were even more like the great majority of women. But, in the same way as Balbec or Florence, the Guermantes, after first disappointing the imagination because they resembled their fellow-creatures rather than their name, could subsequently, though to a less degree, appeal to the intellect by certain distinctive characteristics. Their bodily structure, the colour—a peculiar pink that merged at times into violet—of their skins, a certain almost flashing fairness of the finely spun hair, even in the men, on whom it was massed in soft golden tufts, half a wall-growing lichen, half a catlike fur (a luminous sparkle to which corresponded a certain brilliance of intellect, for if people spoke of the Guermantes complexion, the Guermantes hair, they spoke also of the wit of the Guermantes, as of the wit of the Mortemarts—a certain social quality whose superior fineness was famed even before the days of Louis XIV and all the more universally recognised since they published the fame of it themselves), all this meant that in the material itself, precious as that might be, in which one found them embedded here and there, the Guermantes remained recognisable, easy to detect and to follow, like the veins whose paleness streaks a block of jasper or onyx, or, better still, like the pliant waving of those tresses of light whose loosened hairs run like flexible rays along the sides of a moss-agate.

The Guermantes—those at least who were worthy of the name—were not only of a quality of flesh, of hair, of transparency of gaze that was exquisite, but had a way of holding themselves, of walking, of bowing, of looking at one before they shook one's hand, of shaking hands, which made them as different in all these respects from an ordinary person in society as he in turn was from a peasant in a smock. And despite their friendliness one asked oneself: "Have they not indeed the right, though they waive it, when they see us walk, bow, leave a room, do any of those things which when performed by them become as graceful as the flight of a swallow or the bending of a rose on its stem, to think: 'These people are of another race than ours, and we are, we, the true lords of creation.'?" Later on, I realised that the Guermantes did indeed regard me as being of another race, but one that aroused their envy because I possessed merits of which I knew nothing and which they professed to regard as alone important. Later still I came to feel that this profession of faith was only half sincere and that in them scorn or surprise could be coexistent with admiration and envy. The physical flexibility essential to the Guermantes was twofold; thanks to one of its forms, constantly in action, at any moment and if, for example, a male Guermantes were about to salute a lady, he produced a silhouette of himself made from the unstable equilibrium of a series of asymmetrical movements with nervous compensations, one leg dragging a little, either on purpose or because, having been broken so often in the hunting-field, it imparted to his trunk in its effort to keep pace with the other a deviation to which the upward thrust of one shoulder gave a counterpoise, while the monocle settled itself before his eye, raising an eyebrow just as the tuft of hair on the forehead was lowered in the formal bow; the other flexibility, like the form of the wave, the wind or the ocean track which is preserved on the shell or the vessel, was so to speak stereotyped in a sort of fixed mobility, curving the arched nose which, beneath the blue, protruding eyes, above the over-thin lips, from which, in the women, there emerged a raucous voice, recalled the fabulous origin attributed in the sixteenth century by the complaisance of parasitic and Hellenising genealogists to his race, ancient beyond dispute, but not to the degree of antiquity which they claimed when they gave as its source the mythological impregnation of a nymph by a divine Bird.

The Guermantes were just as idiomatic from the intellectual as from the physical point of view. With the exception of Prince Gilbert (the husband with antiquated ideas of 'Marie-Gilbert,' who made his wife sit on his left when they drove out together because her blood, though royal, was inferior to his own)—but he was an exception and furnished, behind his back, a perpetual laughing-stock to the rest of the family, who had always fresh anecdotes to tell of him—the Guermantes, while living in the pure cream of aristocracy, affected to take no account of nobility. The theories of the Duchesse de Guermantes, who, to tell the truth, by dint of being a Guermantes, became to a certain extent something different and more attractive, subordinated everything else so completely to intellect, and were in politics so socialistic that one asked oneself where in her mansion could be hiding the familiar spirit whose duty it was to ensure the maintenance of the aristocratic standard of living, and which, always invisible but evidently crouching at one moment in the entrance hall, at another in the drawing-room, at a third in her dressing-room, reminded the servants of this woman who did not believe in titles to address her as Mme. la Duchesse, reminding also herself who cared only for reading and had no respect for persons to go out to dinner with her sister-in-law when eight o'clock struck, and to put on a low gown.

The same familiar spirit represented to Mme. de Guermantes the social duties of duchesses, of the foremost among them, that was, who like herself were multi-millionaires, the sacrifice to boring tea, dinner and evening parties of hours in which she might have read interesting books, as unpleasant necessities like rain, which Mme. de Guermantes accepted, letting play on them her biting humour, but without seeking in any way to justify her acceptance of them. The curious accident by which the butler of Mme. de Guermantes invariably said "Madame la Duchesse" to this woman who believed only in the intellect did not however appear to shock her. Never had it entered her head to request him to address her simply as 'Madame.' Giving her the utmost benefit of the doubt one might have supposed that, thinking of something else at the time, she had heard only the word 'Madame' and that the suffix appended to it had not caught her attention. Only, though she might feign deafness, she was not dumb. In fact, whenever she had a message to give to her husband she would say to the butler: "Remind Monsieur le Duc—"

The familiar spirit had other occupations as well, one of which was to inspire them to talk morality. It is true that there were Guermantes who went in for intellect and Guermantes who went in for morals, and that these two classes did not as a rule coincide. But the former kind—including a Guermantes who had forged cheques, who cheated at cards and was the most delightful of them all, with a mind open to every new and sound idea—spoke even more eloquently upon morals than the others, and in the same strain as Mme. de Villeparisis, at the moments in which the familiar spirit expressed itself through the lips of the old lady. At corresponding moments one saw the Guermantes adopt suddenly a tone almost as old-ladylike, as genial and (as they themselves had more charm) more touching than that of the Marquise, to say of a servant: "One feels that she has a thoroughly sound nature, she's not at all a common girl, she must come of decent parents, she is certainly a girl who has never gone astray." At such moments the familiar spirit took the form of an intonation. But at times it could be bearing also, the expression on a face, the same in the Duchess as in her grandfather the Marshal, a sort of undefinable convulsion (like that of the Serpent, the genius of the Carthaginian family of Barca) by which my heart had more than once been set throbbing, on my morning walks, when before I had recognised Mme. de Guermantes I felt her eyes fastened upon me from the inside of a little dairy. This familiar spirit had intervened in a situation which was far from immaterial not merely to the Guermantes but to the Courvoisiers, the rival faction of the family and, though of as good blood as the Guermantes (it was, indeed, through his Courvoisier grandmother that the Guermantes explained the obsession which led the Prince de Guermantes always to speak of birth and titles as though those were the only things that mattered), their opposite in every respect. Not only did the Courvoisiers not assign to intelligence the same importance as the Guermantes, they had not the same idea of it. For a Guermantes (even were he a fool) to be intelligent meant to have a sharp tongue, to be capable of saying cutting things, to 'get away with it'; but it meant also the capacity to hold one's own equally in painting, music, architecture, to speak English. The Courvoisiers had formed a less favourable impression of intelligence, and unless one were actually of their world being intelligent was almost tantamount to 'having probably murdered one's father and mother.' For them intelligence was the sort of burglar's jemmy by means of which people one did not know from Adam forced the doors of the most reputable drawing-rooms, and it was common knowledge among the Courvoisiers that you always had to pay in the long run for having 'those sort' of people in your house. To the most trivial statements made by intelligent people who were not 'in society' the Courvoisiers opposed a systematic distrust. Some one having on one occasion remarked: "But Swann is younger than Palamède,"—"He says so, at any rate, and if he says it you may be sure it's because he thinks it is to his interest!" had been Mme. de Gallardon's retort. Better still, when some one said of two highly distinguished foreigners whom the Guermantes had entertained that one of them had been sent in first because she was the elder: "But is she really the elder?" Mme. de Gallardon had inquired, not positively as though that sort of person did not have any age, but as if presumably devoid of civil or religious status, of definite traditions, they were both more or less young, like two kittens of the same litter between which only a veterinary surgeon was competent to decide. The Courvoisiers, more than the Guermantes, maintained also in a certain sense the integrity of the titled class thanks at once to the narrowness of their minds and the bitterness of their hearts. Just as the Guermantes (for whom, below the royal families and a few others like the Lignes, the La Trémoïlles and so forth, all the rest were lost in a common rubbish-heap) were insolent towards various people of long descent who lived round Guermantes, simply because they paid no attention to those secondary distinctions by which the Courvoisiers were enormously impressed, so the absence of such distinctions affected them little. Certain women who did not hold any specially exalted rank in their native provinces but, brilliantly married, rich, good-looking, beloved of Duchesses, were for Paris, where people are never very well up in who one's 'father and mother' were, an excellent and exclusive piece of 'imported goods.' It might happen, though not commonly, that such women were, through the channel of the Princesse de Parme or by virtue of their own attractions, received by certain Guermantes. But with regard to these the indignation of the Courvoisiers knew no bounds. Having to meet, between five and six in the afternoon, at their cousin's, people with whose relatives their own relatives did not care to be seen mixing down in the Perche became for them an ever-increasing source of rage and an inexhaustible fount of rhetoric. The moment, for instance, when the charming Comtesse G—— entered the Guermantes drawing-room, the face of Mme. de Villebon assumed exactly the expression that would have befitted it had she been called to recite the line:

> And should but one stand fast, that one were surely I,

a line which for that matter was unknown to her. This Courvoisier had consumed almost every Monday an *éclair* stuffed with cream within a few feet of the Comtesse G——, but to no consequence. And Mme. de Villebon confessed in secret that she could not conceive how her cousin Guermantes could allow a woman into her house who was not even in the second-best society of Châteaudun. "I really fail to see why my cousin should make such a fuss about whom she knows; it's making a perfect farce of society!" concluded Mme. de Villebon with a change of facial expression, this time a sly smile of despair, which, in a charade, would have been interpreted rather as indicating another line of poetry, though one with which she was no more familiar than with the first:

Grâce aux Dieux mon malheur passe mon espérance.

We may here anticipate events to explain that the *persévérance* (which rhymes, in the following line with *espérance*) shewn by Mme. de Villebon in snubbing Mme. G—— was not entirely wasted. In the eyes of Mme. G—— it invested Mme. de Villebon with a distinction so supreme, though purely imaginary, that when the time came for Mme. G——'s daughter, who was the prettiest girl and the greatest heiress in the ballrooms of that season, to marry, people were astonished to see her refuse all the Dukes in succession. The fact was that her mother, remembering the weekly humiliations she had had to endure in the Rue de Grenelle on account of Châteaudun could think of only one possible husband for her daughter—a Villebon son.

A single point at which Guermantes and Courvoisiers converged was the art (one, for that matter, of infinite variety) of marking distances. The Guermantes manners were not absolutely uniform towards everyone. And yet, to take an example, all the Guermantes, all those who really were Guermantes, when you were introduced to them proceeded to perform a sort of ceremony almost as though the fact that they held out their hands to you had been as important as the conferring of an order of knighthood. At the moment when a Guermantes, were he no more than twenty, but treading already in the footsteps of his ancestors, heard your name uttered by the person who introduced you, he let fall on you as though he had by no means made up his mind to say "How d'ye do?" a gaze generally blue, always of the coldness of a steel blade which he seemed ready to plunge into the deepest recesses of your heart. Which was a matter of fact what the Guermantes imagined themselves to be doing, each of them regarding himself as a psychologist of the highest order. They thought moreover that they increased by this inspection the affability of the salute which was to follow it, and would not be rendered you without full knowledge of your deserts. All this occurred at a distance from yourself which, little enough had it been a question of a passage of arms, seemed immense for a handclasp, and had as chilling an effect in this connexion as in the other, so that when the Guermantes, after a rapid twisting thrust that explored the most intimate secrets of your soul and laid bare your title to honour, had deemed you worthy to associate with him thereafter, his hand, directed towards you at the end of an arm stretched out to its fullest extent, appeared to be presenting a rapier at you for a single combat, and that hand was in fact placed so far in advance of the Guermantes himself at that moment that when he afterwards bowed his head it was difficult to distinguish whether it was yourself or his own hand that he was saluting. Certain Guermantes, lacking the sense of proportion, or being incapable of refraining from repeating themselves incessantly, went further and repeated this ceremony afresh every time that they met you. Seeing that they had no longer any need to conduct the preliminary psychological investigation for which the 'familiar spirit' had delegated its powers to them and the result of which they had presumably kept in mind, the insistence of the perforating gaze preceding the handclasp could be explained only by the automatism which their gaze had acquired or by some power of fascination which they believed themselves to possess. The Courvoisiers, whose physique was different, had tried in vain to assimilate that searching gaze and had had to fall back upon a lordly stiffness or a rapid indifference. On the other hand, it was from the Courvoisiers that certain very exceptional Guermantes of the gentler sex seemed to have borrowed the feminine form of greeting. At the moment when you were presented to one of these, she made you a sweeping bow in which she carried towards you, almost to an angle of forty-five degrees, her head and bust, the rest of her body (which came very high, up to the belt which formed a pivot) remaining stationary. But no sooner had she projected thus towards you the upper part of her person than she flung it backwards beyond the vertical line by a sudden retirement through almost the same angle. This subsequent withdrawal neutralised what appeared to have been conceded to you; the ground which you believed yourself to have gained did not even remain a conquest, as in a duel; the original positions were retained. This same annulment of affability by the resumption of distance (which was Courvoisier in origin and intended to shew that the advances made in the first movement were no more than a momentary feint) displayed itself equally clearly, in the Courvoisier ladies as in the Guermantes, in the letters which you received from them, at any rate in the first period of your acquaintance. The 'body' of the letter might contain sentences such as one writes only (you would suppose) to a friend, but in vain might you have thought yourself entitled to boast of being in that relation to the lady, since the letter began with *'Monsieur,'* and ended with *'Croyez monsieur à mes sentiments distingués.'* After which, between this cold opening and frigid conclusion which altered the meaning of all the rest, there might come in succession (were it a reply to a letter of condolence from yourself) the most touching pictures of the grief which the Guermantes lady had felt on losing her sister, of the intimacy that had existed between them, of the beauty of the place in which she was staying, of the consolation that she found in the charm of her young children, all this amounted to no more than a letter such as one finds in printed collections, the intimate character of which implied, however, no more intimacy between yourself and the writer than if she had been the Younger Pliny or Mme. de Simiane.

It is true that certain Guermantes ladies wrote to you from the first as 'My dear friend,' or 'My friends'; these were not always the most simple natured among them, but rather those who, living only in the society of kings and being at the same time 'light,' assumed in their pride the certainty that everything which came from themselves gave pleasure and in their corruption the habit of setting no price upon any of the satisfactions that they had to offer. However, since to have had a common ancestor in the reign of Louis XIII was enough to make a young Guermantes say, in speaking of the Marquise de Guermantes: "My aunt Adam," the Guermantes were so numerous a clan that, even among these simple rites, that for example of the bow upon introduction to a stranger, there existed a wide divergence. Each subsection of any refinement had its own, which was handed down from parents to children like the prescription for a liniment or a special way of making jam. Thus it was that we saw Saint-Loup's handclasp thrust out as though involuntarily at the moment of his hearing one's name, without any participation by his eyes, without the addition of a bow. Any unfortunate commoner who for a particular reason—which, for that matter, very rarely occurred—was presented to anyone of the Saint-Loup subsection racked his brains over this abrupt minimum of a greeting, which deliberately assumed the appearance of non-recognition, to discover what in the world the Guermantes—male or female—could have against him. And he was highly surprised to learn that the said Guermantes had thought fit to write specially to the introducer to tell him how delighted he or she had been with the stranger, whom he or she looked forward to meeting again. As specialised as the mechanical gestures of Saint-Loup were the complicated and rapid capers (which M. de Charlus condemned as ridiculous) of the Marquis de Fierbois, the grave and measured paces of the Prince de Guermantes. But it is impossible to describe here the richness of the choreography of the Guermantes ballet owing to the sheer length of the cast.

To return to the antipathy which animated the Courvoisiers against the Duchesse de Guermantes, they might have had the consolation of feeling sorry for her so long as she was still unmarried, for she was then comparatively poor. Unfortunately, at all times and seasons, a sort of fuliginous emanation, quite *sui generis,* enveloped, hid from the eye the wealth of the Courvoisiers which, however great it might be, remained obscure. In vain might a young Courvoisier with an ample dowry find a most eligible bridegroom; it invariably happened that the young couple had no house of their own in Paris, 'came up to stay' in the season with his parents, and for the rest of the year lived down in the country in the thick of a society that may have been unadulterated but was also quite undistinguished. Whereas a Saint-Loup who was up to the eyes in debt dazzled Doncières with his carriage-horses, a Courvoisier who was extremely rich always went in the tram. Similarly (though of course many years earlier) Mlle. de Guermantes (Oriane), who had scarcely a penny to her name, created more stir with her clothes than all the Courvoisiers put together. The really scandalous things she said gave a sort of advertisement to her style of dressing and doing her hair. She had had the audacity to say to the Russian Grand Duke: "Well, Sir, I hear you would like to have Tolstoy murdered?" at a dinner-party to which none of the Courvoisiers, not that any of them knew very much about Tolstoy, had been asked. They knew little more about Greek writers, if we may judge by the Dowager Duchesse de Gallardon (mother-in-law of the Princesse de Gallardon who at that time was still a girl) who, not having been honoured by Oriane with a single visit in five years, replied to some one who asked her the reason for this abstention: "It seems she recites Aristotle" (meaning Aristophanes) "in society. I cannot allow that sort of thing in my house!"

One can imagine how greatly this 'sally' by Mlle. de Guermantes upon

Tolstoy, if it enraged the Courvoisiers, delighted the Guermantes, and by derivation everyone who was not merely closely but even remotely attached to them. The Dowager Comtesse d'Argencourt (*née* Seineport), who entertained a little of everything, because she was a blue-stocking and in spite of her son's being a terrible snob, repeated the saying before her literary friends with the comment: "Oriane de Guermantes, you know; she's as fine as amber, as mischievous as a monkey, there's nothing she couldn't do if she chose, her water-colours are worthy of a great painter and she writes better verses than most of the great poets, and as for family, don't you know, you couldn't imagine anything better, her grandmother was Mlle. de Montpensier, and she is the eighteenth Oriane de Guermantes in succession, without a single misalliance; it's the purest blood, the oldest in the whole of France." And so the sham men of letters, those demi-intellectuals who went to Mme. d'Argencourt's, forming a mental picture of Oriane de Guermantes, whom they would never have an opportunity to know personally, as something more wonderful and more extraordinary than Princess Badroulbadour, not only felt themselves ready to die for her on learning that so noble a person glorified Tolstoy above all others, but felt also quickening with a fresh strength in their minds their own love of Tolstoy, their longing to fight against Tsarism. These liberal ideas might have grown faint in them, they might have begun to doubt their importance, no longer venturing to confess to holding them, when suddenly from Mlle. de Guermantes herself, that is to say from a girl so indisputably cultured and authorised to speak, who wore her hair flat on her brow (a thing that no Courvoisier would ever have consented to do), came this vehement support. A certain number of realities, good or bad in themselves, gain enormously in this way by receiving the adhesion of people who are in authority over us. For instance among the Courvoisiers the rites of affability in a public thoroughfare consisted in a certain bow, very ugly and far from affable in itself but which people knew to be the distinguished way of bidding a person good day, with the result that everyone else, suppressing the instinctive smile of welcome on his own face, endeavoured to imitate these frigid gymnastics. But the Guermantes in general and Oriane in particular, while better conversant than anyone with these rites, did not hesitate, if they caught sight of you from a carriage, to greet you with a sprightly wave of the hand, and in a drawing-room, leaving the Courvoisiers to make their stiff and imitative bows, sketched charming reverences in the air, held out their hands as though to a comrade with a smile from their blue eyes, so that suddenly, thanks to the Guermantes, there entered into the substance of smartness, until then a little hollow and dry, everything that you would naturally have liked and had compelled yourself to forego, a genuine welcome, the effusion of a true friendliness, spontaneity. It is in a similar fashion (but by a rehabilitation which this time is scarcely justified) that people who carry in themselves an instinctive taste for bad music and for melodies, however commonplace, which have in them something easy and caressing, succeed, by dint of education in symphonic culture, in mortifying that appetite. But once they have arrived at this point, when, dazzled—and rightly so—by the brilliant orchestral colouring of Richard Strauss, they see that musician adopt with an indulgence worthy of Auber the most vulgar motifs, what those people originally admired finds suddenly in so high an authority a justification which delights them, and they let themselves be enchanted without scruple and with a twofold gratitude, when they listen to *Salomé*, by what it would have been impossible for them to admire in *Les Diamants de la Couronne.*

Authentic or not, the retort made by Mlle. de Guermantes to the Grand Duke, retailed from house to house, furnished an opportunity to relate the excessive smartness with which Oriane had been turned out at the dinner-party in question. But if such splendour (and this is precisely what rendered it unattainable by the Courvoisiers) springs not from wealth but from prodigality, the latter does nevertheless last longer if it enjoys the constant support of the former, which allows it to spend all its fire. Given the principles openly advertised not only by Oriane but by Mlle. de Villeparisis, namely that nobility does not count, that it is ridiculous to bother one's head about rank, that wealth does not necessarily mean happiness, that intellect, heart, talent are alone of importance, the Courvoisiers were justified in hoping that, as a result of the training she had received from the Marquise, Oriane would marry some one who was not in society, an artist, a fugitive from justice, a scallawag, a free-thinker, that she would pass definitely into the category of what the Courvoisiers called 'detrimentals.' They were all the more justified in this hope since, inasmuch as Mme. de Villeparisis was at this very moment, from the social point of view, passing through an awkward crisis (none of the few bright stars whom I was to meet in her drawing-room had as yet reappeared there), she professed an intense horror of the society which was thus holding her aloof. Even when she referred to her nephew the Prince de Guermantes, whom she did still see, she could never make an end of mocking at him because he was so infatuated about his pedigree. But the moment it became a question of finding a husband for Oriane, it had been no longer the principles publicly advertised by aunt and niece that had controlled the operations, it had been the mysterious 'familiar spirit' of their race. As unerringly as if Mme. de Villeparisis and Oriane had never spoken of anything but rent-rolls and pedigrees in place of literary merit and depth of character, and as if the Marquise, for the space of a few days, had been—as she would ultimately be—dead and on her bier, in the church of Combray, where each member of the family would be reduced to a mere Guermantes, with a forfeiture of individuality and baptismal names to which there testified on the voluminous black drapery of the pall the single 'G' in purple surmounted by the ducal coronet, it was on the wealthiest man and the most nobly born, on the most eligible bachelor of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, on the eldest son of the Duc de Guermantes, the Prince des Laumes, that the familiar spirit had let fall the choice of the intellectual, the critical, the evangelical Mme. de Villeparisis. And for a couple of hours, on the day of the wedding, Mme. de Villeparisis received in her drawing-room all the noble persons at whom she had been in the habit of sneering, at whom she indeed sneered still to the various plebeian intimates whom she had invited and on whom the Prince des Laumes promptly left cards, preparatory to 'cutting the cable' in the following year. And then, making the Courvoisiers' cup of bitterness overflow, the same old maxims, which made out intellect and talent to be the sole claims to social pre-eminence, resumed their doctrinal force in the household of the Princesse des Laumes immediately after her marriage. And in this respect, be it said in passing, the point of view which Saint-Loup upheld when he lived with Rachel, frequented the friends of Rachel, would have liked to marry Rachel, implied—whatever the horror that it inspired in the family—less falsehood than that of the Guermantes young ladies in general, preaching the virtues of intellect, barely admitting the possibility of anyone's questioning the equality of mankind, all of which ended at a given point in the same result as if they had professed the opposite principles, that is to say in marriage to an extremely wealthy duke. Saint-Loup did, on the contrary, act in conformity with his theories, which led people to say that he was treading in evil ways. Certainly from the moral standpoint Rachel was not altogether satisfactory. But it is by no means certain whether, if she had been some person no more worthy but a duchess or the heiress to many millions, Mme. de Marsantes would not have been in favour of the match.

Well, to return to Mme. des Laumes (shortly afterwards Duchesse de Guermantes, on the death of her father-in-law), it was the last agonising straw upon the backs of the Courvoisiers that the theories of the young Princess, remaining thus lodged in her speech, should not in any sense be guiding her conduct; with the result that this philosophy (if one may so call it) in no way impaired the aristocratic smartness of the Guermantes drawing-room. No doubt all the people whom Mme. de Guermantes did not invite imagined that it was because they were not clever enough, and some rich American lady who had never had any book in her possession except a little old copy, never opened, of Parny's poems, arranged because it was of the 'period' upon one of the tables in her inner room, shewed how much importance she attached to the things of the mind by the devouring gaze which she fastened on the Duchesse de Guermantes when that lady made her appearance at the Opera. No doubt, also, Mme. de Guermantes was sincere when she selected a person on account of his or her intellect. When she said of a woman: "It appears, she's quite charming!" or of a man that he was the "cleverest person in the world," she imagined herself to have no other reason for consenting to receive them than this charm or cleverness, the familiar spirit not interposing itself at this last moment; more deeply rooted, stationed at the obscure entry of the region in which the Guermantes exercised their judgment, this vigilant spirit precluded them from finding the man clever or the woman charming if they had no social value, actual or potential. The man was pronounced learned, but like a dictionary, or, on the contrary, common, with the mind of a commercial traveller, the woman pretty, but with a terribly bad style, or too talkative. As for the people who had no definite position, they were simply dreadful—such snobs! M. de Bréauté, whose country house was quite close to Guermantes, mixed with no one below the rank of Highness. But he laughed at them in his heart and longed only to spend his days in museums. Accordingly Mme. de Guermantes was indignant when anyone spoke of M. de Bréauté as a snob. "A snob! Babal! But, my poor friend, you must be mad, it's just the opposite. He loathes smart people; he won't let himself be introduced to anyone. Even in my house! If I ask him to meet some one he doesn't know, he swears at me all the time." This was not to say that, even in practice, the Guermantes did not adopt an entirely different attitude towards cleverness from the Courvoisiers. In a positive sense, this difference between the Guermantes and the Courvoisiers had begun already to bear very promising fruit. Thus the Duchesse de Guermantes, enveloped moreover in a mystery which had set so many poets dreaming of her at a respectful distance, had given that party to which I have already referred, at which the King of England had enjoyed himself more thoroughly than anywhere else, for she had had the idea, which would never have occurred to a Courvoisier mind, of inviting, and the audacity, from which a Courvoisier courage would have recoiled, to invite, apart from the personages already mentioned, the musician Gaston Lemaire and the dramatist Grandmougin. But it was pre-eminently from the negative point of view that intellectuality made itself felt. If the necessary coefficient of cleverness and charm declined steadily as the rank of the person who sought an invitation from the Princesse des Laumes became more exalted, vanishing into zero when he or she was one of the principal Crowned Heads of Europe, conversely the farther they fell below this royal level the higher the coefficient rose. For instance at the Princesse de Parme's parties there were a number of people whom her Royal Highness invited because she had known them as children, or because they were related to some duchess, or attached to the person of some Sovereign, they themselves being quite possibly ugly, boring or stupid; well, with a Courvoisier any of the reasons: "a favourite of the Princesse de Parme," "a niece on the mother's side of the Duchesse d'Arpajon," "spends three months every year with the Queen of Spain," would have been sufficient to make her invite such people to her house, but Mme. de Guermantes, who had politely acknowledged their bows for ten years at the Princesse de Parme's, had never once allowed them to cross her threshold, considering that the same rule applied to a drawing-room in a social as in a material sense, where it only needed a few pieces of furniture which had no particular beauty but were left there to fill the room and as a sign of the owner's wealth, to render it hideous. Such a drawing-room resembled a book in which the author could not refrain from the use of language advertising his own learning, brilliance, fluency. Like a book, like a house, the quality of a 'salon,' thought Mme. de Guermantes—and rightly—is based on the corner-stone of sacrifice.

Many of the friends of the Princesse de Parme, with whom the Duchesse de Guermantes had confined herself for years past to the same conventional greeting, or to returning their cards, without ever inviting them to her parties or going to theirs, complained discreetly of these omissions to her Highness who, on days when M. de Guermantes came by himself to see her, passed on a hint to him. But the wily nobleman, a bad husband to the Duchess in so far as he kept mistresses, but her most tried and trusty friend in everything that concerned the good order of her drawing-room (and her own wit, which formed its chief attraction), replied: "But does my wife know her? Indeed! Oh, well, I daresay she does. But the truth is, Ma'am, that Oriane does not care for women's conversation. She lives surrounded by a court of superior minds—I am not her husband, I am only the first footman. Except for quite a small number, who are all of them very clever indeed, women bore her. Surely, Ma'am, your Highness with all her fine judgment is not going to tell me that the Marquise de Souvré has any brains. Yes, I quite understand, the Princess receives her out of kindness. Besides, your Highness knows her. You tell me that Oriane has met her; it is quite possible, but once or twice at the most, I assure you. And then, I must explain to your Highness, it is really a little my fault as well. My wife is very easily tired, and she is so anxious to be friendly always that if I allowed her she would never stop going to see people. Only yesterday evening she had a temperature, she was afraid of hurting the Duchesse de Bourbon's feelings by not going to see her. I had to shew my teeth, I assure you; I positively forbade them to bring the carriage round. Do you know, Ma'am, I should really prefer not to mention to Oriane that you have spoken to me about Mme. de Souvré. My wife is so devoted to your Highness, she will go round at once to invite Mme. de Souvré to the house; that will mean another call to be paid, it will oblige us to make friends with the sister, whose husband I know quite well. I think I shall say nothing at all about it to Oriane, if the Princess has no objection. That will save her a great deal of strain and excitement. And I assure you that it will be no loss to Mme. de Souvré. She goes everywhere, moves in the most brilliant circles. You know, we don't entertain at all, really, just a few little friendly dinners, Mme. de Souvré would be bored to death." The Princesse de Parme, innocently convinced that the Duc de Guermantes would not transmit her request to his Duchess, and dismayed by her failure to procure the invitation that Mme. de Souvré sought, was all the more flattered to think that she herself was one of the regular frequenters of so exclusive a household. No doubt this satisfaction had its drawbacks also. Thus whenever the Princesse de Parme invited Mme. de Guermantes to her own parties she had to rack her brains to be sure that there was no one else on her list whose presence might offend the Duchess and make her refuse to come again.

On ordinary evenings (after dinner, at which she invariably entertained at a very early hour, for she clung to old customs, a small party) the drawing-room of the Princesse de Parme was thrown open to her regular guests, and, generally speaking, to all the higher ranks of the aristocracy, French and foreign. The order of her receptions was as follows: on issuing from the dining-room the Princess sat down on a sofa before a large round table and chatted with the two most important of the ladies who had dined with her, or else cast her eyes over a magazine, or sometimes played cards (or pretended to play, adopting a German court custom), either a game of patience by herself or selecting as her real or pretended partner some prominent personage. By nine o'clock the double doors of the big drawing-room were in a state of perpetual agitation, opening and shutting and opening again to admit the visitors who had dined quietly at home (or if they had dined in town hurried from their café promising to return later, since they intended only to go in at one door and out at the other) in order to conform with the Princess's time-table. She, meanwhile, her mind fixed on her game or conversation, made a show of not seeing the new arrivals, and it was not until they were actually within reach of her that she rose graciously from her seat, with a friendly smile for the women. The latter thereupon sank before the upright Presence in a courtesy which was tantamount to a genuflexion, so as to bring their lips down to the level of the beautiful hand which hung very low, and to kiss it. But at that moment the Princess, just as if she had been every time surprised by a formality with which nevertheless she was perfectly familiar, raised the kneeling figure as though by main force, and with incomparable grace and sweetness, and kissed her on both cheeks. A grace and sweetness that were conditional, you may say, upon the meekness with which the arriving guest inclined her knee. Very likely; and it seems that in a society without distinctions of rank politeness would vanish, not, as is generally supposed, from want of breeding, but because from one class would have vanished the deference due to a distinction which must be imaginary to be effective, and, more completely still, from the other class the affability in the distribution of which one is prodigal so long as one knows it to be, to the recipient, of an untold value which, in a world based on equality, would at once fall to nothing like everything that has only a promissory worth. But this disappearance of politeness in a reconstructed society is by no means certain, and we are at times too ready to believe that the present is the only possible state of things. People of first-rate intelligence have held the opinion that a Republic could not have any diplomacy or foreign alliances, and, more recently, that the peasant class would not tolerate the separation of Church and State. After all, the survival of politeness in a society levelled to uniformity would be no more miraculous than the practical success of the railway or the use of the aeroplane in war. Besides, even if politeness were to vanish, there is nothing to shew that this would be a misfortune. Lastly, would not society become secretly more hierarchical as it became outwardly more democratic? This seems highly probable. The political power of the Popes has grown enormously since they ceased to possess either States or an Army; our cathedrals meant far less to a devout Catholic of the seventeenth century than they mean to an atheist of the twentieth, and if the Princesse de Parme had been the sovereign ruler of a State, no doubt I should have felt myself impelled to speak of her almost as I should speak of a President of the Republic, that is to say not at all.

As soon as the postulant had been raised from the ground and embraced by the Princess, the latter resumed her seat and returned to her game of patience, but first of all, if the newcomer were of any importance, held her for a moment in conversation, making her sit down in an armchair.

When the room became too crowded the lady in waiting who had to control the traffic cleared the floor by leading the regular guests into an immense hall on to which the drawing-room opened, a hall filled with portraits and minor trophies of the House of Bourbon. The intimate friends of the Princess would then volunteer for the part of guide and would repeat interesting anecdotes, to which the young people had not the patience to listen, more interested in the spectacle of living Royalties (with the possibility of having themselves presented to them by the lady in waiting and the maids of honour) than in examining the relics of dead Sovereigns. Too much occupied with the acquaintances which they would be able to form and the invitations it might perhaps be possible to secure, they knew absolutely nothing, even in after-years, of what there was in this priceless museum of the archives of the Monarchy, and could only recall confusedly that it was decorated with cacti and giant palms which gave this centre of social elegance a look of the palmarium in the Jardin d'Acclimatation.

Naturally the Duchesse de Guermantes, by way of self-mortification, did occasionally appear on these evenings to pay an 'after dinner' call on the Princess, who kept her all the time by her side, while she rallied the Duke. But on evenings when the Duchess came to dine, the Princess took care not to invite her regular party, and closed her doors to the world on rising from table, for fear lest a too liberal selection of guests might offend the exacting Duchess. On such evenings, were any of the faithful who had not received warning to present themselves on the royal doorstep, they would be informed by the porter: "Her Royal Highness is not at home this evening," and would turn away. But, long before this, many of the Princess's friends had known that, on the day in question, they would not be asked to her house. These were a special set of parties, a privilege barred to so many who must have longed for admission. The excluded could, with a practical certainty, enumerate the roll of the elect, and would say irritably among themselves: "You know, of course, that Oriane de Guermantes never goes anywhere without her entire staff." With the help of this body the Princesse de Parme sought to surround the Duchess as with a protecting rampart against those persons the chance of whose making a good impression on her was at all doubtful. But with several of the Duchess's favourites, with several members of this glittering 'staff,' the Princesse de Parme resented having to go out of her way to shew them attentions, seeing that they paid little or no attention to herself. No doubt the Princess was fully prepared to admit that it was possible to derive more enjoyment in the company of the Duchesse de Guermantes than in her own. She could not deny that there was always a 'crush' on the Duchess's at-home days, or that she herself often met there three or four royal personages who thought it sufficient to leave their cards upon her. And in vain might she commit to memory Oriane's witty sayings, copy her gowns, serve at her own tea-parties the same strawberry tarts, there were occasions on which she was left by herself all afternoon with a lady in waiting and some foreign Counsellor of Legation. And so whenever (as had been the case with Swann, for instance, at an earlier period) there was anyone who never let a day pass without going to spend an hour or two at the Duchess's and paid a call once in two years on the Princesse de Parme, the latter felt no great desire, even for the sake of amusing Oriane, to make to this Swann or whoever he was the 'advances' of an invitation to dinner. In a word, having the Duchess in her house was for the Princess a source of endless perplexity, so haunted was she by the fear that Oriane would find fault with everything. But in return, and for the same reason, when the Princesse de Parme came to dine with Mme. de Guermantes she could be certain beforehand that everything would be perfect, delightful, she had only one fear which was that of her own inability to understand, remember, give satisfaction, her inability to assimilate new ideas and people. On this account my presence aroused her attention and excited her cupidity, just as might a new way of decorating the dinner-table with festoons of fruit, uncertain as she was which of the two it might be—the table decorations or my presence—that was the more distinctively one of those charms, the secret of the success of Oriane's parties, and in her uncertainty firmly resolved to try at her own next dinner-party to introduce them both. What for that matter fully justified the enraptured curiosity which the Princesse de Parme brought to the Duchess's house was that element—amusing, dangerous, exciting—into which the Princess used to plunge with a combination of anxiety, shock and delight (as at the seaside on one of those days of 'big waves' of the danger of which the bathing-masters warn us, simply and solely because none of them knows how to swim), from which she used to emerge terrified, happy, rejuvenated, and which was known as the wit of the Guermantes. The wit of the Guermantes—a thing as non-existent as the squared circle, according to the Duchess who regarded herself as the sole Guermantes to possess it—was a family reputation like that of the pork pies of Tours or the biscuits of Rheims. No doubt (since an intellectual peculiarity does not employ for its perpetuation the same channels as a shade of hair or complexion) certain intimate friends of the Duchess who were not of her blood were nevertheless endowed with this wit, which on the other hand had failed to permeate the minds of various Guermantes, too refractory to assimilate wit of any kind. The holders, not related to the Duchess, of this Guermantes wit had generally the characteristic feature of having been brilliant men, fitted for a career to which, whether it were in the arts, diplomacy, parliamentary eloquence or the army, they had preferred the life of a small and intimate group. Possibly this preference could be explained by a certain want of originality, of initiative, of will power, of health or of luck, or possibly by snobbishness.

With certain people (though these, it must be admitted, were the exception) if the Guermantes drawing-room had been the stumbling-block in their careers, it had been without their knowledge. Thus a doctor, a painter and a diplomat of great promise had failed to achieve success in the careers for which they were nevertheless more brilliantly endowed than most of their competitors because their friendship with the Guermantes had the result that the two former were regarded as men of fashion and the third as a reactionary, which had prevented each of the three from winning the recognition of his colleagues. The mediaeval gown and red cap which are still donned by the electoral colleges of the Faculties are (or were at least, not so long since) something more than a purely outward survival from a narrow-minded past, from a rigid sectarianism. Under the cap with its golden tassels, like the High Priest in the conical mitre of the Jews, the 'Professors' were still, in the years that preceded the Dreyfus case, fast rooted in rigorously pharisaical ideas. Du Boulbon was at heart an artist, but was safe because he did not care for society. Cottard was always at the Verdurins'. But Mme. Verdurin was a patient; besides, he was protected by his vulgarity; finally, at his own house he entertained no one outside the Faculty, at banquets over which there floated an aroma of carbolic. But in powerful corporations, where moreover the rigidity of their prejudices is but the price that must be paid for the noblest integrity, the most lofty conceptions of morality, which weaken in an atmosphere that, more tolerant, freer at first, becomes very soon dissolute, a Professor in his gown of scarlet satin faced with ermine, like that of a Doge (which is to say a Duke) of Venice enshrined in the Ducal Palace, was as virtuous, as deeply attached to noble principles, but as unsparing of any alien element as that other Duke, excellent but terrible, whom we know as M. de Saint-Simon. The alien, here, was the wordly doctor, with other manners, other social relations. To make good, the unfortunate of whom we are now speaking, so as not to be accused by his colleagues of looking down on them (the strange ideas of a man of fashion!) if he concealed from them his Duchesse de Guermantes, hoped to disarm them by giving mixed dinner-parties in which the medical element was merged in the fashionable. He was unaware that in so doing he signed his own death-warrant, or rather he discovered this later, when the Council of Ten had to fill a vacant chair, and it was invariably the name of another doctor, more normal, it might be obviously inferior, that leaped from the fatal urn, when their 'Veto' thundered from the ancient Faculty, as solemn, as absurd and as terrible as the 'Juro' that spelled the death of Molière. So too with the painter permanently labelled man of fashion, when fashionable people who dabbled in art had succeeded in making themselves be labelled artists; so with the diplomat who had too many reactionary associations.

But this case was the rarest of all. The type of distinguished man who formed the main substance of the Guermantes drawing-room was that of people who had voluntarily (or so at least they supposed) renounced all else, everything that was incompatible with the wit of the Guermantes, with the courtesy of the Guermantes, with that indefinable charm odious to any 'Corporation' however little centralised.

And the people who were aware that in days gone by one of these frequenters of the Duchess's drawing-room had been awarded the gold medal of the Salon, that another, Secretary to the Bar Council, had made a brilliant start in the Chamber, that a third had ably served France as Chargé d'Affaires, might have been led to regard as 'failures' people who had done nothing more now for twenty years. But there were few who were thus 'well-informed,' and the parties concerned would themselves have been the last to remind people, finding these old distinctions to be now valueless, in the light of this very Guermantes spirit of wit: for did not this condemn respectively as a bore or an usher, and as a counter-jumper a pair of eminent Ministers, one a trifle solemn, the other addicted to puns, of whose praises the newspapers were always full but in whose company Mme. de Guermantes would begin to yawn and shew signs of impatience if the imprudence of a hostess had placed either of them next to her at the dinner-table. Since being a statesman of the first rank was in no sense a recommendation to the Duchess's favour, those of her friends who had definitely abandoned the 'Career' or the 'Service,' who had never stood for the Chamber, felt, as they came day after day to have luncheon and talk with their great friend, or when they met her in the houses of Royal Personages, of whom for that matter they thought very little (or at least they said so), that they themselves had chosen the better part, albeit their melancholy air, even in the midst of the gaiety, seemed somehow to challenge the soundness of this opinion.

It must be recognised also that the refinement of social life, the subtlety of conversation at the Guermantes' did also contain, exiguous as it may have been, an element of reality. No official title was equivalent to the approval of certain chosen friends of Mme. de Guermantes, whom the most powerful Ministers had been unable to attract to their houses. If in this drawing-room so many intellectual ambitions, such noble efforts even had been for ever buried, still at least from their dust the rarest blossoms of civilised society had taken life. Certainly men of wit, Swann for instance, regarded themselves as superior to men of genuine worth, whom they despised, but that was because what the Duchesse de Guermantes valued above everything else was not intellect; it was, according to her, that superior, more exquisite form of the human intellect exalted to a verbal variety of talent—wit. And long ago at the Verdurins' when Swann condemned Brichot and Elstir, one as a pedant and the other as a clown, despite all the learning of one and the other's genius, it was the infiltration of the Guermantes spirit that had led him to classify them so. Never would he have dared to present either of them to the Duchess, conscious instinctively of the air with which she would have listened to Brichot's monologues and Elstir's hair-splittings, the Guermantes spirit regarding pretentious and prolix speech, whether in a serious or a farcical vein, as alike of the most intolerable imbecility.

As for the Guermantes of the true flesh and blood, if the Guermantes spirit had not absorbed them as completely as we see occur in, to take an example, those literary circles in which everyone shares a common way of pronouncing his words, of expressing his thoughts, and consequently of thinking, it was certainly not because originality is stronger in purely social groups or presents any obstacle there to imitation. But imitation depends not merely upon the absence of any unconquerable originality but also demands a relative fineness of ear which enables one first of all to discern what one is afterwards to imitate. Whereas there were several Guermantes in whom this musical sense was as entirely lacking as in the Courvoisiers.

To take as an instance what is called, in another sense of the word imitation, 'giving imitations' (or among the Guermantes was called 'taking off'), Mme. de Guermantes might succeed in this to perfection, the Courvoisiers were as incapable of appreciating her as if they had been a tribe of rabbits instead of men and women, because they had never had the sense to observe the particular defect or accent that the Duchess was endeavouring to copy. When she 'gave an imitation' of the Duc de Limoges, the Courvoisiers would protest: "Oh, no, he doesn't really speak like that! I met him again only yesterday at dinner at Bebeth's; he talked to me all evening and he didn't speak like that at all!" whereas the Guermantes of any degree of culture exclaimed: "Gad, what fun Oriane is! The odd part of it is that when she is copying him she looks exactly like him! I feel I'm listening to him. Oriane, do give us a little more Limoges!" Now these Guermantes (and not necessarily the few really outstanding members of the clan who, when the Duchess imitated the Duc de Limoges, would say admiringly: "Oh, you really have got him," or "You do get him,") might indeed be devoid of wit according to Mme. de Guermantes (and in this respect she was right); yet, by dint of hearing and repeating her sayings they had come to imitate more or less her way of expressing herself, of criticising people, of what Swann, like the Duke himself, used to call her 'phrasing' of things, so that they presented in their conversation something which to the Courvoisiers appeared 'fearfully like' Oriane's wit and was treated by them collectively as the 'wit of the Guermantes.' As these Guermantes were to her not merely kinsfolk but admirers, Oriane (who kept the rest of the family rigorously at arm's-length and now avenged by her disdain the insults that they had heaped upon her in her girlhood) went to call on them now and then, generally in company with the Duke, in the season, when she drove out with him. These visits were historic events. The heart began to beat more rapidly in the bosom of the Princesse d'Epinay, who was 'at home' in her big drawing-room on the ground floor, when she perceived afar off, like the first glow of an innocuous fire, or the 'reconnaissances' of an unexpected invasion, making her way across the courtyard slowly, in a diagonal course, the Duchess crowned with a ravishing hat and holding atilt a sunshade from which there rained down a summer fragrance. "Why, here comes Oriane," she would say, like an 'On guard!' intended to convey a prudent warning to her visitors, so that they should have time to beat an orderly retreat, to clear the rooms without panic. Half of those present dared not remain, and rose at once to go. "But no, why? Sit down again, I insist on keeping you a little longer," said the Princess in a careless tone and seemingly at her ease (to shew herself the great lady) but in a voice that suddenly rang false. "But you may want to talk to each other." "Really, you're in a hurry? Oh, very well, I shall come and see you," replied the lady of the house to those whom she was just as well pleased to see depart. The Duke and Duchess gave a very civil greeting to people whom they had seen there regularly for years, without for that reason coming to know them any better, while these in return barely said good day to them, thinking this more discreet. Scarcely had they left the room before the Duke began asking good-naturedly who they were, so as to appear to be taking an interest in the intrinsic quality of people whom he himself, owing to the cross-purposes of fate or the wretched state of Oriane's nerves, never saw in his own house. "Tell me, who was that little woman in the pink hat?" "Why, my dear cousin, you have seen her hundreds of times, she's the Vicomtesse de Tours, who was a Lamarzelle." "But, do you know, she's quite good-looking; she seems clever too; if it weren't for a little flaw in her upper lip she'd be a regular charmer. If there's a Vicomte de Tours, he can't have any too bad a time. Oriane, do you know what those eyebrows and the way her hair grows reminded me of? Your cousin Hedwige de Ligne."

The Duchesse de Guermantes, who languished whenever people spoke of the beauty of any woman other than herself, let the conversation drop. She had reckoned without the weakness her husband had for letting it be seen that he knew all about the people who did not come to his house, whereby he believed that he shewed himself to be more seriously minded than his wife. "But," he resumed suddenly with emphasis, "you mentioned the name Lamarzelle. I remember, when I was in the Chamber, hearing a really remarkable speech made . . ." "That was the uncle of the young woman you saw just now." "Indeed! What talent! No, my dear girl," he assured the Vicomtesse d'Egremont, whom Mme. de Guermantes could not endure, but who, refusing to stir from the Princesse d'Epinay's drawing-room where she willingly humbled herself to play the part of parlour-maid (and was ready to slap her own parlour-maid on returning home), stayed there, confused, tearful, but stayed when the ducal couple were in the room, took their cloaks, tried to make herself useful, offered discreetly to withdraw into the next room, "you are not to make tea for us, let us just sit and talk quietly, we are simple souls, really, honestly. Besides," he went on, turning to the Princesse d'Epinay (leaving the Egremont lady blushing, humble, ambitious and full of zeal), "we can only give you a quarter of an hour." This quarter of an hour was entirely taken up with a sort of exhibition of the witty things which the Duchess had said during the previous week, and to which she herself would certainly not have referred had not her husband, with great adroitness, by appearing to be rebuking her with reference to the incidents that had provoked them, obliged her as though against her will to repeat them.

The Princesse d'Epinay, who was fond of her cousin and knew that she had a weakness for compliments, went into ecstasies over her hat, her sunshade, her wit. "Talk to her as much as you like about her clothes," said the Duke in the sullen tone which he had adopted and now tempered with a sardonic smile so that his resentment should not be taken seriously, "but for heaven's sake don't speak of her wit, I should be only too glad not to have so witty a wife. You are probably alluding to the shocking pun she made about my brother Palamède," he went on, knowing quite well that the Princess and the rest of the family had not yet heard this pun, and delighted to have an opportunity of shewing off his wife. "In the first place I consider it unworthy of a person who has occasionally, I must admit, said some quite good things, to make bad puns, but especially about my brother, who is very susceptible, and if it is going to lead to his quarrelling with me, that would really be too much of a good thing." "But we never heard a word about it! One of Oriane's puns! It's sure to be delicious. Oh, do tell us!" "No, no," the Duke went on, still sulking though with a broader smile, "I'm so glad you haven't heard it. Seriously, I'm very fond of my brother." "Listen, Basin," broke in the Duchess, the moment having come for her to take up her husband's cue, "I can't think why you should say that it might annoy Palamède, you know quite well it would do nothing of the sort. He is far too intelligent to be vexed by a stupid joke which has nothing offensive about it. You are making them think I said something nasty; I simply uttered a remark which was not in the least funny, it is you who make it seem important by losing your temper over it. I don't understand you." "You are making us terribly excited, what is it all about?" "Oh, obviously nothing serious!" cried M. de Guermantes. "You may have heard that my brother offered to give Brézé, the place he got from his wife, to his sister Marsantes." "Yes, but we were told that she didn't want it, she didn't care for that part of the country, the climate didn't suit her." "Very well, some one had been telling my wife all that and saying that if my brother was giving this place to our sister it was not so much to please her as to tease her. 'He's such a teaser, Charlus,' was what they actually said. Well, you know Brézé, it's a royal domain, I should say it's worth millions, it used to be part of the crown lands, it includes one of the finest forests in the whole of France. There are plenty of people who would be only too delighted to be teased to that tune. And so when she heard the word 'teaser' applied to Charlus because he was giving away such a magnificent property, Oriane could not help exclaiming, without meaning anything, I must admit, there wasn't a trace of ill-nature about it, for it came like a flash of lightning: 'Teaser, teaser? Then he must be Teaser Augustus.' You understand," he went on, resuming his sulky tone, having first cast a sweeping glance round the room in order to judge the effect of his wife's witticism—and in some doubt as to the extent of Mme. d'Epinay's acquaintance with ancient history, "you understand, it's an allusion to Augustus Caesar, the Roman Emperor; it's too stupid, a bad play on words, quite unworthy of Oriane. And then, you see, I am more circumspect than my wife, if I haven't her wit, I think of the consequences; if anyone should be so ill-advised as to repeat the remark to my brother there'll be the devil to pay. All the more," he went on, "because as you know Palamède is very high and mighty, and very fussy also, given to gossip and all that sort of thing, so that quite apart from the question of his giving away Brézé you must admit that 'Teaser Augustus' suits him down to the ground. That is what justifies my wife's remarks; even when she is inclined to stoop to what is almost vulgar, she is always witty and does really describe people."

And so, thanks on one occasion to 'Teaser Augustus,' on another to something else, the visits paid by the Duke and Duchess to their kinsfolk replenished the stock of anecdotes, and the emotion which these visits aroused lasted long after the departure of the sparkling lady and her 'producer.' Her hostess would begin by going over again with the privileged persons who had been at the entertainment (those who had remained in the room) the clever things that Oriane had said. "You hadn't heard 'Teaser Augustus'?" asked the Princesse d'Epinay. "Yes," replied the Marquise de Baveno, blushing as she spoke, "the Princesse de Sarsina (the La Rochefoucauld one) mentioned it to me, not quite in the same words. But of course it was far more interesting to hear it repeated like that with my cousin in the room," she went on, as though speaking of a song that had been accompanied by the composer himself. "We were speaking of Oriane's latest—she was here just now," her hostess greeted a visitor who would be plunged in despair at not having arrived an hour earlier. "What! Has Oriane been here?" "Yes, you ought to have come a little sooner," the Princesse d'Epinay informed her, not in reproach but letting her understand all that her clumsiness had made her miss. It was her fault alone if she had not been present at the Creation of the World or at Mme. Carvalho's last performance. "What do you think of Oriane's latest? I must say, I do enjoy 'Teaser Augustus'," and the 'saying' would be served up again cold next day at luncheon before a few intimate friends who were invited on purpose, and would reappear under various sauces throughout the week. Indeed the Princess happening in the course of that week to pay her annual visit to the Princesse de Parme seized the opportunity to ask whether her Royal Highness had heard the pun, and repeated it to her. "Ah! Teaser Augustus," said the Princesse de Parme, her eyes bulging with an instinctive admiration, which begged however for a complementary elucidation which Mme. d'Epinay was not loath to furnish. "I must say, 'Teaser Augustus' pleases me enormously as a piece of 'phrasing'," she concluded. As a matter of fact the word 'phrasing' was not in the least applicable to this pun, but the Princesse d'Epinay, who claimed to have assimilated her share of the Guermantes spirit, had borrowed from Oriane the expressions 'phrased' and 'phrasing' and employed them without much discrimination. Now the Princesse de Parme, who was not at all fond of Mme. d'Epinay, whom she considered plain, knew to be miserly and believed, on the authority of the Courvoisiers, to be malicious, recognised this word 'phrasing' which she had heard used by Mme. de Guermantes but would not by herself have known how or when to apply. She received the impression that it was in fact its 'phrasing' that formed the charm of 'Teaser Augustus' and, without altogether forgetting her antipathy towards the plain and miserly lady, could not repress a burst of admiration for a person endowed to such a degree with the Guermantes spirit, so strong that she was on the point of inviting the Princesse d'Epinay to the Opera. She was held in check only by the reflexion that it would be wiser perhaps to consult Mme. de Guermantes first. As for Mme. d'Epinay, who, unlike the Courvoisiers, paid endless attentions to Oriane and was genuinely fond of her but was jealous of her exalted friends and slightly irritated by the fun which the Duchess used to make of her before everyone on account of her meanness, she reported on her return home what an effort it had required to make the Princesse de Parme grasp the point of 'Teaser Augustus,' and declared what a snob Oriane must be to number such a goose among her friends. "I should never have been able to see much of the Princesse de Parme even if I had cared to," she informed the friends who were dining with her. "M. d'Epinay would not have allowed it for a moment, because of her immorality," she explained, alluding to certain purely imaginary excesses on the part of the Princess. "But even if I had had a husband less strict in his views, I must say I could never have made friends with her. I don't know how Oriane can bear to see her every other day, as she does. I go there once a year, and it's all I can do to sit out my call." As for those of the Courvoisiers who happened to be at Victurnienne's on the day of Mme. de Guermantes's visit, the arrival of the Duchess generally put them to flight owing to the exasperation they felt at the 'ridiculous salaams' that were made to her there. One alone remained on the afternoon of 'Teaser Augustus.' He did not entirely see the point, but he did see part of it, being an educated man. And the Courvoisiers went about repeating that Oriane had called uncle Palamède 'Caesar Augustus,' which was, according to them, a good enough description of him, but why all this endless talk about Oriane, they went on. People couldn't make more fuss about a queen. "After all, what is Oriane? I don't say that the Guermantes aren't an old family, but the Courvoisiers are every bit as good in rank, antiquity, marriages. We mustn't forget that on the Field of the Cloth of Gold, when the King of England asked François I who was the noblest of the lords there present, 'Sire,' said the King of France, 'Courvoisier.' " But even if all the Courvoisiers had stayed in the room to hear them, Oriane's sayings would have fallen on deaf ears, since the incidents that usually gave occasion for those sayings would have been regarded by them from a totally different point of view. If, for instance, a Courvoisier found herself running short of chairs, in the middle of a party, or if she used the wrong name in greeting a guest whose face she did not remember, or if one of her servants said something stupid, the Courvoisier, extremely annoyed, flushed, quivering with excitement, would deplore so unfortunate an occurrence. And when she had a visitor in the room and Oriane was expected, she would say in a tone anxiously and imperiously questioning: "Do you know her?", fearing that if the visitor did not know her his presence might make an unfortunate impression on Oriane. But Mme. de Guermantes on the contrary extracted from such incidents opportunities for stories which made the Guermantes laugh until the tears streamed down their cheeks, so that one was obliged to envy her her having run short of chairs, having herself made or having allowed her servant to make a blunder, having had at her party some one whom nobody knew, as one is obliged to be thankful that great writers have been kept at a distance by men and betrayed by women when their humiliations and their sufferings have been if not the direct stimulus of their genius, at any rate the subject matter of their works.

The Courvoisiers were incapable of rising to the level of the spirit of innovation which the Duchesse de Guermantes introduced into the life of society and, by adapting it, following an unerring instinct, to the necessities of the moment, made into something artistic where the purely rational application of cut and dried rules would have given as unfortunate results as would greet a man who, anxious to succeed in love or in politics, was to reproduce in his own daily life the exploits of Bussy d'Amboise. If the Courvoisiers gave a family dinner or a dinner to meet some prince, the addition of a recognised wit, of some friend of their son seemed to them an anomaly capable of producing the direst consequences. A Courvoisier whose father had been a Minister of the Empire having to give an afternoon party to meet Princesse Mathilde deduced by a geometrical formula that she could invite no one but Bonapartists. Of whom she knew practically none. All the smart women of her acquaintance, all the amusing men were ruthlessly barred because, from their Legitimist views or connexions, they might easily, according to Courvoisier logic, give offence to the Imperial Highness. The latter, who in her own house entertained the flower of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, was quite surprised when she found at Mme. de Courvoisier's only a notorious old sponger whose husband had been an Imperial Prefect, the widow of the Director of Posts and sundry others known for their loyalty to Napoleon, their stupidity and their dullness. Princesse Mathilde, however, in no way stinted the generous and refreshing shower of her sovereign grace over these miserable scarecrows whom the Duchesse de Guermantes, for her part, took good care not to invite when it was her turn to entertain the Princess, but substituted for them without any abstract reasoning about Bonapartism the most brilliant coruscation of all the beauties, all the talents, all the celebrities, who, the exercise of some subtle sixth sense made her feel, would be acceptable to the niece of the Emperor even when they belonged actually to the Royal House. There was not lacking indeed the Duc d'Aumale, and when on withdrawing the Princess, raising Mme. de Guermantes from the ground where she had sunk in a curtsey and was trying to kiss the august hand, embraced her on both cheeks, it was from the bottom of her heart that she was able to assure the Duchess that never had she spent a happier afternoon nor seen so delightful a party. The Princesse de Parme was Courvoisier in her incapacity for innovation in social matters, but unlike the Courvoisiers the surprise that was perpetually caused her by the Duchesse de Guermantes engendered in her not, as in them, antipathy but admiration. This astonishment was still farther enhanced by the infinitely backward state of the Princess's education. Mme. de Guermantes was herself a great deal less advanced than she supposed. But it was enough for her to have gone a little beyond Mme. de Parme to stupefy that lady, and, as the critics of each generation confine themselves to maintaining the direct opposite of the truths admitted by their predecessors, she had only to say that Flaubert, that archenemy of the bourgeois, had been bourgeois through and through, or that there was a great deal of Italian music in Wagner, to open before the Princess, at the cost of a nervous exhaustion which recurred every time, as before the eyes of a swimmer in a stormy sea, horizons that seemed to her unimaginable and remained for ever vague. A stupefaction caused also by the paradoxes uttered with relation not only to works of art but to persons of their acquaintance and to current social events. No doubt the incapacity that prevented Mme. de Parme from distinguishing the true wit of the Guermantes from certain rudimentarily acquired forms of that wit (which made her believe in the high intellectual worth of certain, especially certain female Guermantes, of whom she was bewildered on hearing the Duchess confide to her with a smile that they were mere blockheads) was one of the causes of the astonishment which the Princess always felt on hearing Mme. de Guermantes criticise other people. But there was another cause also, one which I, who knew at this time more books than people and literature better than life, explained to myself by thinking that the Duchess, living this wordly life the idleness and sterility of which are to a true social activity what criticism, in art, is to creation, extended to the persons who surrounded her the instability of point of view, the uneasy thirst of the reasoner who to assuage a mind that has grown too dry goes in search of no matter what paradox that is still fairly new, and will make no bones about upholding the refreshing opinion that the really great *Iphigénie* is Piccini's and not Gluck's, at a pinch the true *Phèdre* that of Pradon.

When a woman who was intelligent, educated, witty had married a shy bumpkin whom one saw but seldom and never heard, Mme. de Guermantes one fine day would find a rare intellectual pleasure not only in decrying the wife but in 'discovering' the husband. In the Cambremer household, for example, if she had lived in that section of society at the time, she would have decreed that Mme. de Cambremer was stupid, and that the really interesting person, misunderstood, delightful, condemned to silence by a chattering wife but himself worth a thousand of her, was the Marquis, and the Duchess would have felt on declaring this the same kind of refreshment as the critic who, after people have for seventy years been admiring *Hernani,* confesses to a preference for *Le Lion Amoureux.* And from this same morbid need of arbitrary novelties, if from her girlhood everyone had been pitying a model wife, a true saint, for being married to a scoundrel, one fine day Mme. de Guermantes would assert that this scoundrel was perhaps a frivolous man but one with a heart of gold, whom the implacable harshness of his wife had driven to do the most inconsistent things. I knew that it is not only over different works, in the long course of centuries, but over different parts of the same work that criticism plays, thrusting back into the shadow what for too long has been thought brilliant, and making emerge what has appeared to be doomed to permanent obscurity. I had not only seen Bellini, Winterhalter, the Jesuit architects, a Restoration cabinet-maker come to take the place of men of genius who were called 'worn out,' simply because they had worn out the lazy minds of the intellectuals, as neurasthenics are always worn out and always changing; I had seen preferred in Sainte-Beuve alternately the critic and the poet, Musset rejected so far as his poetry went save for a few quite unimportant little pieces. No doubt certain essayists are mistaken when they set above the most famous scenes in *Le Cid* or *Polyeucte* some speech from *Le Menteur* which, like an old plan, furnishes information about the Paris of the day, but their predilection, justified if not by considerations of beauty at least by a documentary interest, is still too rational for our criticism run mad. It will barter the whole of Molière for a line from *L'Etourdi,* and even when it pronounces Wagner's *Tristan* a bore will except a 'charming note on the horns' at the point where the hunt goes by. This depravation of taste helped me to understand that of which Mme. de Guermantes gave proof when she decided that a man of their world, recognised as a good fellow but a fool, was a monster of egoism, sharper than people thought—that another widely known for his generosity might be the personification of avarice, that a good mother paid no attention to her children, and that a woman generally supposed to be vicious was really actuated by the noblest feelings. As though spoiled by the nullity of life in society, the intelligence and perception of Mme. de Guermantes were too vacillating for disgust not to follow pretty swiftly in the wake of infatuation (leaving her still ready to feel herself attracted afresh by the kind of cleverness which she had in turn sought out and abandoned) and for the charm which she had felt in some warm-hearted man not to change, if he came too often to see her, sought too freely from her directions which she was incapable of giving him, into an irritation which she believed to be produced by her admirer but which was in fact due to the utter impossibility of finding pleasure when one does nothing else than seek it. The variations of the Duchess's judgment spared no one, except her husband. He alone had never been in love with her, in him she had always felt an iron character, indifferent to the caprices that she displayed, contemptuous of her beauty, violent, of a will that would never bend, the sort under which alone nervous people can find tranquillity. M. de Guermantes on the other hand, pursuing a single type of feminine beauty but seeking it in mistresses whom he constantly replaced, had, once he had left them, and to express derision of them, only an associate, permanent and identical, who irritated him often by her chatter but as to whom he knew that everyone regarded her as the most beautiful, the most virtuous, the cleverest, the best-read member of the aristocracy, as a wife whom he, M. de Guermantes, was only too fortunate to have found, who cloaked all his irregularities, entertained like no one else in the world, and upheld for their drawing-room its position as the premier in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. This common opinion he himself shared; often moved to ill-humour against her, he was proud of her. If, being as niggardly as he was fastidious, he refused her the most trifling sums for her charities or for the servants, yet he insisted upon her wearing the most sumptuous clothes and driving behind the best horses in Paris. Whenever Mme. de Guermantes had just perpetrated, with reference to the merits and defects, which she suddenly transposed, of one of their friends, a new and succulent paradox, she burned to make trial of it before people capable of relishing it, to bring out its psychological originality and to set its epigrammatic brilliance sparkling. No doubt these new opinions embodied as a rule no more truth than the old, often less; but this very element, arbitrary and incalculable, of novelty which they contained conferred on them something intellectual which made the communication of them exciting. Only the patient on whom the Duchess was exercising her psychological skill was generally an intimate friend as to whom those people to whom she longed to hand on her discovery were entirely unaware that he was not still at the apex of her favour; thus the reputation that Mme. de Guermantes had of being an incomparable friend, sentimental, tender and devoted, made it difficult for her to launch the attack herself; she could at the most intervene later on, as though under constraint, by uttering a response to appease, to contradict in appearance but actually to support a partner who had taken it on himself to provoke her; this was precisely the part in which M. de Guermantes excelled.

As for social activities, it was yet another form of pleasure, arbitrary and spectacular, that Mme. de Guermantes felt in uttering, with regard to them, those unexpected judgments which pricked with an incessant and exquisite feeling of surprise the Princesse de Parme. But with this one of the Duchess's pleasures it was not so much with the help of literary criticism as by following political life and the reports of parliamentary debates that I tried to understand in what it might consist. The successive and contradictory edicts by which Mme. de Guermantes continually reversed the scale of values among the people of her world no longer sufficing to distract her, she sought also in the manner in which she ordered her own social behaviour, in which she recorded her own most trivial decisions on points of fashion, to taste those artificial emotions, to fulfil those adventitious obligations which stimulate the perceptions of Parliaments and gain hold of the minds of politicians. We know that when a Minister explains to the Chamber that he believed himself to be acting rightly in following a line of conduct which does, as a matter of fact, appear quite straightforward to the commonsense person who next morning in his newspaper reads the report of the sitting, this commonsense reader does nevertheless feel himself suddenly stirred and begins to doubt whether he has been right in approving the Minister's conduct when he sees that the latter's speech was listened to with the accompaniment of a lively agitation and punctuated with expressions of condemnation such as: "It's most serious!" ejaculated by a Deputy whose name and titles are so long, and followed in the report by movements so emphatic that in the whole interruption the words "It's most serious!" occupy less room than a hemistich does in an alexandrine. For instance in the days when M. de Guermantes, Prince des Laumes, sat in the Chamber, one used to read now and then in the Paris newspapers, albeit it was intended primarily for the Méséglise division, to shew the electors there that they had not given their votes to an inactive or voiceless mandatory:

(Monsieur de Guermantes-Bouillon, Prince des Laumes: "This is serious!" "Hear, hear!" from the Centre and some of the Right benches, loud exclamations from the Extreme Left.)

The commonsense reader still retains a gleam of faith in the sage Minister, but his heart is convulsed with a fresh palpitation by the first words of the speaker who rises to reply:

"The astonishment, it is not too much to say the stupor" (keen sensation on the Right side of the House) "that I have felt at the words of one who is still, I presume, a member of the Government" (thunder of applause) . . . Several Under-Secretaries of State for Posts and Telegraphs without Deputies then crowded round the Ministerial bench. Then rising from his seat, nodded his head in the affirmative.

This 'thunder of applause' carries away the last shred of resistance in the mind of the commonsense reader; he discovers to be an insult to the Chamber, monstrous in fact, a course of procedure which in itself is of no importance; it may be some normal action such as arranging that the rich shall pay more than the poor, bringing to light some piece of injustice, preferring peace to war; he will find it scandalous and will see in it an offence to certain principles to which as a matter of fact he had never given a thought, which are not engraved on the human heart, but which move him forcibly by reason of the acclamations which they provoke and the compact majorities which they assemble.

It must at the same time be recognised that this subtlety of the politician which served to explain to me the Guermantes circle, and other groups in society later on, is nothing more than the perversion of a certain fineness of interpretation often described as 'reading between the lines.' If in representative assemblies there is absurdity owing to perversion of this quality, there is equally stupidity, through the want of it, in the public who take everything 'literally,' who do not suspect a dismissal when a high dignitary is relieved of his office 'at his own request,' and say: "He cannot have been dismissed, since it was he who asked leave to retire,"—a defeat when the Russians by a strategic movement withdraw upon a stronger position that has been prepared beforehand, a refusal when, a Province having demanded its independence from the German Emperor, he grants it religious autonomy. It is possible, moreover (to return to these sittings of the Chamber), that when they open the Deputies themselves are like the commonsense person who will read the published report. Learning that certain workers on strike have sent their delegates to confer with a Minister, they may ask one another innocently: "There now, I wonder what they can have been saying; let's hope it's all settled," at the moment when the Minister himself mounts the tribune in a solemn silence which has already brought artificial emotions into play. The first words of the Minister: "There is no necessity for me to inform the Chamber that I have too high a sense of what is the duty of the Government to have received a deputation of which the authority entrusted to me could take no cognisance," produce a dramatic effect, for this was the one hypothesis which the commonsense of the Deputies had not imagined. But precisely because of its dramatic effect it is greeted with such applause that it is only after several minutes have passed that the Minister can succeed in making himself heard, the Minister who will receive on returning to his place on the bench the congratulations of his colleagues. We are as deeply moved as on the day when the same Minister failed to invite to a big official reception the President of the Municipal Council who was supporting the Opposition, and declare that on this occasion as on the other he has acted with true statesmanship.

M. de Guermantes at this period in his life had, to the great scandal of the Courvoisiers, frequently been among the crowd of Deputies who came forward to congratulate the Minister. I have heard it said afterwards that even at a time when he was playing a fairly important part in the Chamber and was being thought of in connexion with Ministerial office or an Embassy he was, when a friend came to ask a favour of him, infinitely more simple, behaved politically a great deal less like the important political personage than anyone else who did not happen to be Duc de Guermantes. For if he said that nobility made no difference, that he regarded his fellow Deputies as equals, he did not believe it for a moment. He sought, pretended to value but really despised political importance, and as he remained in his own eyes M. de Guermantes it did not envelop his person in that dead weight of high office which makes other politicians unapproachable. And in this way his pride guarded against every assault not only his manners which were of an ostentatious familiarity but also such true simplicity as he might actually have.

To return to those artificial and moving decisions such as are made by politicians, Mme. de Guermantes was no less disconcerting to the Guermantes, the Courvoisiers, the Faubourg in general and, more than anyone, the Princesse de Parme by her habit of issuing unaccountable decrees behind which one could feel to be latent principles which impressed one all the more, the less one expected them. If the new Greek Minister gave a fancy dress ball, everyone chose a costume and asked everyone else what the Duchess would wear. One thought that she would appear as the Duchesse de Bourgogne, another suggested as probable the guise of Princess of Dujabar, a third Psyche. Finally, a Courvoisier having asked her: "What are you going to wear, Oriane?" provoked the one response of which nobody had thought: "Why, nothing at all!" which at once set every tongue wagging, as revealing Oriane's opinion as to the true social position of the new Greek Minister and the proper attitude to adopt towards him, that is to say the opinion which ought to have been foreseen, namely that a duchess 'was not expected' to attend the fancy dress ball given by this new Minister: "I do not see that there is any necessity to go to the Greek Minister's; I do not know him; I am not a Greek; why should I go to these people's house, I have nothing to do with them?" said the Duchess. "But everybody will be there, they say it's going to be charming!" cried Mme. de Gallardon. "Still, it's just as charming sometimes to sit by one's own fireside," replied Mme. de Guermantes. The Courvoisiers could not get over this, but the Guermantes, without copying it, approved of their cousin's attitude. "Naturally, everybody isn't in a position like Oriane to break with all the conventions. But if you look at it in one way you can't say she was actually wrong in wishing to shew that we are going rather far in flinging ourselves at the feet of all these foreigners who appear from heaven knows where." Naturally, knowing the stream of comment which one or other attitude would not fail to provoke, Mme. de Guermantes took as much pleasure in appearing at a party to which her hostess had not dared to count on her coming as in staying at home or spending the evening at the play with her husband on the night of a party to which 'everybody was going,' or, again, when people imagined that she would eclipse the finest diamonds with some historic diadem, by stealing into the room without a single jewel, and in another style of dress than what had been, wrongly, supposed to be essential to the occasion. Albeit she was anti-Dreyfusard (while retaining her belief in the innocence of Dreyfus, just as she spent her life in the social world believing only in abstract ideas) she had created an enormous sensation at a party at the Princesse de Ligne's, first of all by remaining seated after all the ladies had risen to their feet as General Mercier entered the room, and then by getting up and in a loud voice asking for her carriage when a Nationalist orator had begun to address the gathering, thereby shewing that she did not consider that society was meant for talking politics; all heads were turned towards her at a Good Friday concert at which, although a Voltairean, she had not remained because she thought it indecent to bring Christ upon the stage. We know how important, even for the great queens of society, is that moment of the year at which the round of entertainment begins: so much so that the Marquise d'Amoncourt, who, from a need to say something, a form of mania, and also from want of perception, was always making a fool of herself, had actually replied to somebody who had called to condole with her on the death of her father, M. de Montmorency: "What makes it sadder still is that it should come at a time when one's mirror is simply stuffed with cards!" Very well, at this point in the social year, when people invited the Duchesse de Guermantes to dinner, making every effort to see that she was not already engaged, she declined, for the one reason of which nobody in society would ever have thought; she was just starting on a cruise among the Norwegian fjords, which were so interesting. People in society were stupefied, and, without any thought of following the Duchess's example, derived nervertheless from her action that sense of relief which one has in reading Kant when after the most rigorous demonstration of determinism one finds that above the world of necessity there is the world of freedom. Every invention of which no one has ever thought before excites the interest even of people who can derive no benefit from it. That of steam navigation was a small thing compared with the employment of steam navigation at that sedentary time of year called 'the season.' The idea that anyone could voluntarily renounce a hundred dinners or luncheons, twice as many afternoon teas, three times as many evening parties, the most brilliant Mondays at the Opera and Tuesdays at the Français to visit the Norwegian fjords seemed to the Courvoisiers no more explicable than the idea of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea,* but conveyed to them a similar impression of independence and charm. So that not a day passed on which somebody might not be heard to ask, not merely: "You've heard Oriane's latest joke?" but "You know Oriane's latest?" and on 'Oriane's latest' as on 'Oriane's latest joke' would follow the comment: "How typical of Oriane!" "Isn't that pure Oriane?" Oriane's latest might be, for instance, that, having to write on behalf of a patriotic society to Cardinal X—, Bishop of Mâcon (whom M. de Guermantes when he spoke of him invariably called 'Monsieur de Mascon,' thinking this to be 'old French'), when everyone was trying to imagine what form the letter would take, and had no difficulty as to the opening words, the choice lying between 'Eminence,' and 'Monseigneur,' but was puzzled as to the rest, Oriane's letter, to the general astonishment, began: 'Monsieur le Cardinal,' following an old academic form, or: 'My Cousin,' this term being in use among the Princes of the Church, the Guermantes and Crowned Heads, who prayed to God to take each and all of them into 'His fit and holy keeping.' To start people on the topic of an 'Oriane's latest' it was sufficient that at a performance at which all Paris was present and a most charming play was being given, when they looked for Mme. de Guermantes in the boxes of the Princesse de Parme, the Princesse de Guermantes, countless other ladies who had invited her, they discovered her sitting by herself, in black, with a tiny hat on her head, in a stall in which she had arrived before the curtain rose. "You hear better, when it's a play that's worth listening to," she explained, to the scandal of the Courvoisiers and the admiring bewilderment of the Guermantes and the Princesse de Parme, who suddenly discovered that the 'fashion' of hearing the beginning of a play was more up to date, was a proof of greater originality and intelligence (which need not astonish them, coming from Oriane) than that of arriving for the last act after a big dinner-party and 'going on' somewhere first. Such were the various kinds of surprise for which the Princesse de Parme knew that she ought to be prepared if she put a literary or social question to Mme. de Guermantes, one result of which was that during these dinner-parties at Oriane's her Royal Highness never ventured upon the slightest topic save with the uneasy and enraptured prudence of the bather emerging from between two breakers.

Among the elements which, absent from the three or four other more or less equivalent drawing-rooms that set the fashion for the Faubourg Saint-Germain, differentiated from them that of the Duchesse de Guermantes, just as Leibniz allows that each monad, while reflecting the entire universe, adds to it something of its own, one of the least attractive was regularly furnished by one or two extremely good-looking women who had no title to be there apart from their beauty and the use that M. de Guermantes had made of them, and whose presence revealed at once, as does in other drawing-rooms that of certain otherwise unaccountable pictures, that in this household the husband was an ardent appreciator of feminine graces. They were all more or less alike, for the Duke had a taste for large women, at once statuesque and loose-limbed, of a type half-way between the Venus of Milo and the Samothracian Victory; often fair, rarely dark, sometimes auburn, like the most recent, who was at this dinner, that Vicomtesse d'Arpajon whom he had loved so well that for a long time he had obliged her to send him as many as ten telegrams daily (which slightly annoyed the Duchess), corresponded with her by carrier pigeon when he was at Guermantes, and from whom moreover he had long been so incapable of tearing himself away that, one winter which he had had to spend at Parma, he travelled back regularly every week to Paris, spending two days in the train, in order to see her.

As a rule these handsome 'supers' had been his mistresses but were no longer (as was Mme. d'Arpajon's case) or were on the point of ceasing to be so. It may well have been that the importance which the Duchess enjoyed in their sight and the hope of being invited to her house, though they themselves came of thoroughly aristocratic, but still not quite first-class stock, had prompted them, even more than the good looks and generosity of the Duke, to yield to his desires. Not that the Duchess would have placed any insuperable obstacle in the way of their crossing her threshold: she was aware that in more than one of them she had found an ally, thanks to whom she had obtained a thousand things which she wanted but which M. de Guermantes pitilessly denied his wife so long as he was not in love with some one else. And so the reason why they were not invited by the Duchess until their intimacy with the Duke was already far advanced lay principally in the fact that he, every time that he had embarked on the deep waters of love, had imagined nothing more than a brief flirtation, as a reward for which he considered an invitation from his wife to be more than adequate. And yet he found himself offering this as the price of far less, for a first kiss in fact, because a resistance upon which he had never reckoned had been brought into play or because there had been no resistance. In love it often happens that gratitude, the desire to give pleasure, makes us generous beyond the limits of what the other person's expectation and self-interest could have anticipated. But then the realisation of this offer was hindered by conflicting circumstances. In the first place, all the women who had responded to M. de Guermantes's love, and sometimes even when they had not yet surrendered themselves to him, he had, one after another, segregated from the world. He no longer allowed them to see anyone, spent almost all his time in their company, looked after the education of their children to whom now and again, if one was to judge by certain speaking likenesses later on, he had occasion to present a little brother or sister. And so if, at the start of the connexion, the prospect of an introduction to Mme. de Guermantes, which had never crossed the mind of the Duke, had entered considerably into the thoughts of his mistress, their connexion had by itself altered the whole of the lady's point of view; the Duke was no longer for her merely the husband of the smartest woman in Paris, but a man with whom his new mistress was in love, a man moreover who had given her the means and the inclination for a more luxurious style of living and had transposed the relative importance in her mind of questions of social and of material advantage; while now and then a composite jealousy, into which all these factors entered, of Mme. de Guermantes animated the Duke's mistresses. But this case was the rarest of all; besides, when the day appointed for the introduction at length arrived (at a point when as a rule the Duke had lost practically all interest in the matter, his actions, like everyone's else, being generally dictated by previous actions the prime motive of which had already ceased to exist), it frequently happened that it was Mme. de Guermantes who had sought the acquaintance of the mistress in whom she hoped, and so greatly needed, to discover, against her dread husband, a valuable ally. This is not to say that, save at rare moments, in their own house, where, when the Duchess talked too much, he let fall a few words or, more dreadful still, preserved a silence which rendered her speechless, M. de Guermantes failed in his outward relations with his wife to observe what are called the forms. People who did not know them might easily misunderstand. Sometimes between the racing at Deauville, the course of waters and the return to Guermantes for the shooting, in the few weeks which people spend in Paris, since the Duchess had a liking for café-concerts, the Duke would go with her to spend the evening at one of these. The audience remarked at once, in one of those little open boxes in which there is just room for two, this Hercules in his 'smoking' (for in France we give to everything that is more or less British the one name that it happens not to bear in England), his monocle screwed in his eye, in his plump but finely shaped hand, on the ring-finger of which there glowed a sapphire, a plump cigar from which now and then he drew a puff of smoke, keeping his eyes for the most part on the stage but, when he did let them fall upon the audience in which there was absolutely no one whom he knew, softening them with an air of gentleness, reserve, courtesy and consideration. When a verse struck him as amusing and not too indecent, the Duke would turn round with a smile to his wife, letting her share, by a twinkle of good-natured understanding, the innocent merriment which the new song had aroused in himself. And the spectators might believe that there was no better husband in the world than this, nor anyone more enviable than the Duchess—that woman outside whom every interest in the Duke's life lay, that woman with whom he was not in love, to whom he had been consistently unfaithful; when the Duchess felt tired, they saw M. de Guermantes rise, put on her cloak with his own hands, arranging her necklaces so that they did not catch in the lining, and clear a path for her to the street with an assiduous and respectful attention which she received with the coldness of the woman of the world who sees in such behaviour simply conventional politeness, at times even with the slightly ironical bitterness of the disabused spouse who has no illusion left to shatter. But despite these externals (another element of that politeness which has made duty evolve from the depths of our being to the surface, at a period already remote but still continuing for its survivors) the life of the Duchess was by no means easy. M. de Guermantes never became generous or human save for a new mistress who would take, as it generally happened, the Duchess's part; the latter saw becoming possible for her once again generosities towards inferiors, charities to the poor, even for herself, later on, a new and sumptuous motor-car. But from the irritation which developed as a rule pretty rapidly in Mme. de Guermantes at people whom she found too submissive the Duke's mistresses were not exempt. Presently the Duchess grew tired of them. Simultaneously, at this moment, the Duke's intimacy with Mme. d'Arpajon was drawing to an end. Another mistress dawned on the horizon.

No doubt the love which M. de Guermantes had had for each of them in succession would begin one day to make itself felt afresh; in the first place, this love in dying bequeathed them, like beautiful marbles—marbles beautiful to the Duke, become thus in part an artist, because he had loved them and was sensitive now to lines which he would not have appreciated without love—which brought into juxtaposition in the Duchess's drawing-room their forms long inimical, devoured by jealousies and quarrels, and finally reconciled in the peace of friendship; besides, this friendship itself was an effect of the love which had made M. de Guermantes observe in those who were his mistresses virtues which exist in every human being but are perceptible only to the sensual eye, so much so that the ex-mistress, become 'the best of comrades' who would do anything in the world for one, is as recognised a type as the doctor or father who is not a doctor or a father but a friend. But during a period of transition the woman whom M. de Guermantes was preparing to abandon bewailed her lot, made scenes, shewed herself exacting, appeared indiscreet, became a nuisance. The Duke began to take a dislike to her. Then Mme. de Guermantes had an opportunity to bring into prominence the real or imagined defects of a person who annoyed her. Known as a kind woman, Mme. de Guermantes received the telephone messages, the confidences, the tears of the abandoned mistress and made no complaint. She laughed at them, first with her husband, then with a few chosen friends. And imagining that this pity which she shewed for the poor wretch gave her the right to make fun of her, even to her face, whatever the lady might say, provided it could be included among the attributes of the character for absurdity which the Duke and Duchess had recently fabricated for her, Mme. de Guermantes had no hesitation in exchanging with her husband a glance of ironical connivance.

Meanwhile, as she sat down to table, the Princesse de Parme remembered that she had thought of inviting a certain other Princess to the Opera, and, wishing to be assured that this would not in any way offend Mme. de Guermantes, was preparing to sound her. At this moment there entered M. de Grouchy, whose train, owing to some block on the line, had been held up for an hour. He made what excuses he could. His wife, had she been a Courvoisier, would have died of shame. But Mme. de Grouchy was not a Guermantes for nothing. As her husband was apologising for being late:

"I see," she broke in, "that even in little things arriving late is a tradition in your family."

"Sit down, Grouchy, and don't let them pull your leg," said the Duke.

"I hope I move with the times, still I must admit that the Battle of Waterloo had its points, since it brought about the Restoration of the Bourbons, and better still in a way which made them unpopular. But you seem to be a regular Nimrod!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I have had quite a good bag. I shall take the liberty of sending the Duchess six brace of pheasants to-morrow."

An idea seemed to flicker in the eyes of Mme. de Guermantes. She insisted that M. de Grouchy must not give himself the trouble of sending the pheasants. And making a sign to the betrothed footman with whom I had exchanged a few words on my way from the Elstir room:

"Poullein," she told him, "you will go to-morrow and fetch M. le Comte's pheasants and bring them straight back—you won't mind, will you, Grouchy, if I make a few little presents. Basin and I can't eat a whole dozen by ourselves."

"But the day after to-morrow will be soon enough," said M. de Grouchy.

"No, to-morrow suits me better," the Duchess insisted.

Poullein had turned pale; his appointment with his sweetheart would have to be missed. This was quite enough for the diversion of the Duchess, who liked to appear to be taking a human interest in everyone. "I know it's your day out," she went on to Poullein, "all you've got to do is to change with Georges; he can take to-morrow off and stay in the day after."

But the day after, Poullein's sweetheart would not be free. A holiday then was of no account to him. As soon as he was out of the room, everyone complimented the Duchess on the interest she took in her servants. "But I only behave towards them as I like people to behave to me." "That's just it. They can say they've found a good place with you." "Oh, nothing so very wonderful. But I think they all like me. That one is a little annoying because he's in love. He thinks it incumbent on him to go about with a long face."

At this point Poullein reappeared. "You're quite right," said M. de Grouchy, "he doesn't look much like smiling. With those fellows one has to be good but not too good." "I admit I'm not a very dreadful mistress.

He'll have nothing to do all day but call for your pheasants, sit in the house doing nothing and eat his share of them." "There are plenty of people who would be glad to be in his place," said M. de Grouchy, for envy makes men blind.

"Oriane," began the Princesse de Parme, "I had a visit the other day from your cousin Heudicourt; of course she's a highly intelligent woman; she's a Guermantes, one can say no more, but they tell me she has a spiteful tongue." The Duke fastened on his wife a slow gaze of deliberate stupefaction. Mme. de Guermantes began to smile. Gradually the Princess became aware of their pantomime. "But . . . do you mean to say . . . you don't agree with me?" she stammered with growing uneasiness. "Really, Ma'am, it's too good of you to pay any attention to Basin's faces. Now, Basin, you're not to hint nasty things about our cousins." "He thinks her too wicked?" inquired the Princess briskly. "Oh, dear me, no!" replied the Duchess. "I don't know who told your Highness that she was spiteful. On the contrary, she's an excellent creature who never said any harm of anyone, or did any harm to any one." "Ah!" sighed Mme. de Parme, greatly relieved. "I must say I never noticed anything myself. But I know it's often difficult not to be a little spiteful when one is so full of wit . . ." "Ah! Now that is a quality of which she has even less." "Less wit?" asked the stupefied Princess. "Come now, Oriane," broke in the Duke in a plaintive tone, casting to right and left of him a glance of amusement, "you heard the Princess tell you that she was a superior woman." "But isn't she?" "Superior in chest measurement, at any rate." "Don't listen to him, Ma'am, he's not sincere; she's as stupid as a (h'm) goose," came in a loud and rasping voice from Mme. de Guermantes, who, a great deal more 'old French' even than the Duke when he was not trying, did often deliberately seek to be, but in a manner the opposite of the lace-neckcloth, deliquescent style of her husband and in reality far more subtle, by a sort of almost peasant pronunciation which had a harsh and delicious flavour of the soil. "But she's the best woman in the world. Besides, I don't really know that one can call it stupidity when it's carried to such a point as that. I don't believe I ever met anyone quite like her; she's a case for a specialist, there's something pathological about her, she's a sort of 'innocent' or 'cretin' or an 'arrested development,' like the people you see in melodramas, or in *L'Arlésienne*. I always ask myself, when she comes to see me, whether the moment may not have arrived at which her intelligence is going to dawn, which makes me a little nervous always." The Princess was lost in admiration of these utterances but remained stupefied by the preceding verdict. "She repeated to me—and so did Mme. d'Epinay—what you said about 'Teaser Augustus.' It's delicious," she put in.

M. de Guermantes explained the joke to me. I wanted to tell him that his brother, who pretended not to know me, was expecting me that same evening at eleven o'clock. But I had not asked Robert whether I might mention this engagement, and as the fact that M. de Charlus had practically fixed it with me himself directly contradicted what he had told the Duchess I judged it more tactful to say nothing. " 'Teaser Augustus' was not bad," said M. de Guermantes, "but Mme. d'Heudicourt probably did not tell you a far better thing that Oriane said to her the other day in reply to an invitation to luncheon." "No, indeed! Do tell me!" "Now Basin, you keep quiet; in the first place, it was a stupid remark, and it will make the Princess think me inferior even to my fool of a cousin. Though I don't know why I should call her my cousin. She's one of Basin's cousins. Still, I believe she is related to me in some sort of way." "Oh!" cried the Princesse de Parme, at the idea that she could possibly think Mme. de Guermantes stupid, and protesting helplessly that nothing could ever lower the Duchess from the place she held in her estimation. "Besides we have already subtracted from her the quality of wit; as what I said to her tends to deny her certain other good qualities also, it seems to me inopportune to repeat it." "'Deny her!' 'Inopportune!' How well she expresses herself!" said the Duke with a pretence of irony, to win admiration for the Duchess. "Now, then, Basin, you're not to make fun of your wife." "I should explain to your Royal Highness," went on the Duke, "that Oriane's cousin may be superior, good, stout, anything you like to mention, but she is not exactly—what shall I say—lavish." "No, I know, she's terribly close-fisted," broke in the Princess. "I should not have ventured to use the expression, but you have hit on exactly the right word. You can see it in her house-keeping, and especially in the cooking, which is excellent, but strictly rationed." "Which leads to some quite amusing scenes," M. de Bréauté interrupted him. "For instance, my dear Basin, I was down at Heudicourt one day when you were expected, Oriane and yourself. They had made the most elaborate preparations when, during the afternoon, a footman brought in a telegram to say that you weren't coming." "That doesn't surprise me!" said the Duchess, who not only was difficult to secure, but liked people to know as much. "Your cousin read the telegram, was duly distressed, then immediately, without losing her head, telling herself that there was no point in going to unnecessary expense for so unimportant a gentleman as myself, called the footman back. 'Tell the cook not to put on the chicken!' she shouted after him. And that evening I heard her asking the butler: 'Well? What about the beef that was left over yesterday? Aren't you going to let us have that?' " "All the same, one must admit that the cheer you get there is of the very best," said the Duke, who fancied that in using this language he shewed himself to belong to the old school. "I don't know any house where one gets better food." "Or less," put in the Duchess. "It is quite wholesome and quite enough for what you would call a vulgar yokel like myself," went on the Duke, "one keeps one's appetite." "Oh, if it's to be taken as a cure, it's certainly more hygienic than sumptuous. Not that it's as good as all that," added Mme. de Guermantes, who was not at all pleased that the title of 'best table in Paris' should be awarded to any but her own. "With my cousin it's just the same as with those costive authors who hatch out every fifteen years a one-act play or a sonnet. The sort of thing people call a little masterpiece, trifles that are perfect gems, in fact the one thing I loathe most in the world. The cooking at Zénaïde's is not bad, but you would think it more ordinary if she was less parsimonious. There are some things her cook does quite well, and others that he spoils. I have had some thoroughly bad dinners there, as in most houses, only they've done me less harm there because the stomach is, after all, more sensitive to quantity than to quality." "Well, to get on with the story," the Duke concluded, "Zénaïde insisted that Oriane should go to luncheon there, and as my wife is not very fond of going out anywhere she resisted, wanted to be sure that under the pretence of a quiet meal she was not being trapped into some great banquet, and tried in vain to find out who else were to be of the party. 'You must come,' Zénaïde insisted, boasting of all the good things there would be to eat. 'You are going to have a *purée* of chestnuts, I need say no more than that, and there will be seven little *bouchées à la reine.*' 'Seven little *bouchées*!' cried Oriane, 'that means that we shall be at least eight!' " There was silence for a few seconds, and then the Princess having seen the point let her laughter explode like a peal of thunder. "Ah! 'Then we shall be eight,'—it's exquisite. How very well phrased!" she said, having by a supreme effort recaptured the expression she had heard used by Mme. d'Epinay, which this time was more appropriate. "Oriane, that was very charming of the Princess, she said your remark was well phrased." "But, my dear, you're telling me nothing new. I know how clever the Princess is," replied Mme. de Guermantes, who readily assimilated a remark when it was uttered at once by a Royal Personage and in praise of her own wit. "I am very proud that Ma'am should appreciate my humble phrasings. I don't remember, though, that I ever did say such a thing, and if I did it must have been to flatter my cousin, for if she had ordered seven 'mouthfuls,' the mouths, if I may so express myself, would have been a round dozen if not more."

"She used to have all M. de Bornier's manuscripts," went on the Princess, still speaking of Mme. d'Heudicourt, and anxious to make the most of the excellent reasons she might have for associating with that lady. "She must have dreamed it, I don't believe she ever even know him," said the Duchess. "What is really interesting about him is that he kept up a correspondence with people of different nationalities at the same time," put in the Vicomtesse d'Arpajon who, allied to the principal ducal and even reigning families of Europe, was always glad that people should be reminded of the fact. "Surely, Oriane," said M. de Guermantes, with ulterior purpose, "you can't have forgotten that dinner-party where you had M. de Bornier sitting next to you!" "But, Basin," the Duchess interrupted him, "if you mean to inform me that I knew M. de Bornier, why of course I did, he even called upon me several times, but I could never bring myself to invite him to the house because I should always have been obliged to have it disinfected afterwards with formol. As for the dinner you mean, I remember it only too well, but it was certainly not at Zénaïde's, who never set eyes on Bornier in her life, and would probably think if you spoke to her of the *Fille de Roland* that you meant a Bonaparte Princess who was said at one time to be engaged to the son of the King of Greece; no, it was at the Austrian Embassy. Dear Hoyos imagined he was giving me a great treat by planting on the chair next to mine that pestiferous academician. I quite thought I had a squadron of mounted police sitting beside me. I was obliged to stop my nose as best I could, all through dinner; until the gruyère came round I didn't dare to breathe." M. de Guermantes, whose secret object was attained, made a furtive examination of his guests' faces to judge the effect of the Duchess's pleasantry. "You were speaking of correspondence; I must say, I thought Gambetta's admirable," she went on, to shew that she was not afraid to be found taking an interest in a proletarian and a radical. M. de Bréauté, who fully appreciated the brilliance of this feat of daring, gazed round him with an eye at once flashing and affectionate, after which he wiped his monocle.

"Gad, it's infernally dull that *Fille de Roland*," said M. de Guermantes, with the satisfaction which he derived from the sense of his own superiority to a work which had bored him so, perhaps also from the *suave mari magno* feeling one has in the middle of a good dinner, when one recalls so terrible an evening in the past. "Still, there were some quite good lines in it, and a patriotic sentiment."

I let it be understood that I had no admiration for M. de Bornier. "Indeed! You have some fault to find with him?" the Duke asked with a note of curiosity, for he always imagined when anyone spoke ill of a man that it must be on account of a personal resentment, just as to speak well of a woman marked the beginning of a love-affair. "I see you've got your knife into him. What did he do to you? You must tell us. Why yes, there must be some skeleton in the cupboard or you wouldn't run him down. It's long-winded, the *Fille de Roland*, but it's quite strong in parts." "Strong is just the right word for an author who smelt like that," Mme. de Guermantes broke in sarcastically. "If this poor boy ever found himself face to face with him, I can quite understand that he carried away an impression in his nostrils!" "I must confess, though, to Ma'am," the Duke went on, addressing the Princesse de Parme, "that quite apart from the *Fille de Roland*, in literature and even in music I am terribly old-fashioned; no old nightingale can be too stale for my taste. You won't believe me, perhaps, but in the evenings, if my wife sits down to the piano, I find myself calling for some old tune by Auber or Boïeldieu, or even Beethoven! That's the sort of thing that appeals to me. As for Wagner, he sends me to sleep at once." "You are wrong there," said Mme. de Guermantes, "in spite of his insufferable long-windedness, Wagner was a genius. *Lohengrin* is a masterpiece. Even in *Tristan* there are some amusing passages scattered about. And the Chorus of Spinners in the *Flying Dutchman* is a perfect marvel." "A'n't I right, Babal," said M. de Guermantes, turning to M. de Bréauté, "what we like is:

Les rendez-vous de noble compagnie
Se donnent tous en ce charmant séjour.

It's delicious. And *Fra Diavolo,* and the *Magic Flute,* and the *Chalet,* and the *Marriage of Figaro,* and the *Diamants de la Couronne*—there's music for you! It's the same thing in literature. For instance, I adore Balzac, the *Bal de Sceaux,* the *Mohicans de Paris.*" "Oh, my dear, if you are going to begin about Balzac, we shall never hear the end of it; do wait, keep it for some evening when Mémé's here. He's even better, he knows it all by heart." Irritated by his wife's interruption, the Duke held her for some seconds under the fire of a menacing silence. And his huntsman's eyes reminded me of a brace of loaded pistols. Meanwhile Mme. d'Arpajon had been exchanging with the Princesse de Parme, upon tragic and other kinds of poetry, a series of remarks which did not reach me distinctly until I caught the following from Mme. d'Arpajon: "Oh, Ma'am is sure to be right; I quite admit he makes the world seem ugly, because he's unable to distinguish between ugliness and beauty, or rather because his insufferable vanity makes him believe that everything he says is beautiful; I agree with your Highness that in the piece we are speaking of there are some ridiculous things, quite unintelligible, errors of taste, that it is difficult to understand, that it's as much trouble to read as if it was written in Russian or Chinese, for of course it's anything in the world but French, still when one has taken the trouble, how richly one is rewarded, it's so full of imagination!" Of this little lecture I had missed the opening sentences. I gathered in the end not only that the poet incapable of distinguishing between beauty and ugliness was Victor Hugo, but furthermore that the poem which was as difficult to understand as Chinese or Russian was

Lorsque l'enfant paraît, le cercle de famille
Applaudit à grands cris.

a piece dating from the poet's earliest period, and perhaps even nearer to Mme. Deshoulières than to the Victor Hugo of the *Légende des Siècles.* Far from condemning Mme. d'Arpajon as absurd, I saw her (the only one, at that table so matter-of-fact, so nondescript, at which I had sat down with such keen disappointment), I saw her in my mind's eye crowned with that lace cap, with the long spiral ringlets falling from it on either side, which was worn by Mme. de Rémusat, Mme. de Broglie, Mme. de Saint-Aularie, all those distinguished women who in their fascinating letters quote with so much learning and so aptly passages from Sophocles, Schiller and the *Imitation,* but in whom the earliest poetry of the Romantics induced the alarm and exhaustion inseparable for my grandmother from the latest verses of Stéphane Mallarmé. "Mme. d'Arpajon is very fond of poetry," said the Princesse de Parme to her hostess, impressed by the ardent tone in which the speech had been delivered. "No; she knows absolutely nothing about it," replied Mme. de Guermantes in an undertone, taking advantage of the fact that Mme. d'Arpajon, who was dealing with an objection raised by General de Beautreillis, was too much intent upon what she herself was saying to hear what was being murmured by the Duchess. "She has become literary since she's been forsaken. I can tell your Highness that it is I who have to bear the whole burden of it because it is to me that she comes in floods of tears whenever Basin hasn't been to see her, which is practically every day. And yet it isn't my fault, after all, if she bores him, and I can't force him to go to her, although I would rather he were a little more faithful to her, because then I shouldn't see quite so much of her myself. But she drives him crazy, and there's nothing extraordinary in that. She isn't a bad sort, but she's boring to a degree you can't imagine. And all this because Basin took it into his head for a year or so to play me false with her. And to have in addition a footman who has fallen in love with a little street-walker and goes about with a long face if I don't request the young person to leave her profitable pavement for half an hour and come to tea with me! Oh! Life really is too tedious!" the Duchess languorously concluded. Mme. d'Arpajon bored M. de Guermantes principally because he had recently fallen in love with another, whom I discovered to be the Marquise de Surgis-le-Duc. At this moment the footman who had been deprived of his holiday was waiting at table. And it struck me that, still disconsolate, he was doing it with a good deal of difficulty, for I noticed that, in handing the dish to M. de Châtellerault, he performed his task so awkwardly that the Duke's elbow came in contact several times with his own. The young Duke was not in the least annoyed with the blushing footman, but looked up at him rather with a smile in his clear blue eyes. This good humour seemed to me on the guest's part to betoken a kindness of heart. But the persistence of his smile led me to think that, aware of the servant's discomfiture, what he felt was perhaps really a malicious joy. "But, my dear, you know you're not revealing any new discovery when you tell us about Victor Hugo," went on the Duchess, this time addressing Mme. d'Arpajon whom she had just seen turn away from the General with a troubled air. "You mustn't expect to launch that young genius. Everybody knows that he has talent. What is utterly detestable is the Victor Hugo of the last stage, the *Légende des Siècles*, I forget all their names. But in the *Feuilles d'Automne*, the *Chants du Crépuscule*, there's a great deal that's the work of a poet, a true poet! Even in the *Contemplations*," went on the Duchess, whom none of her listeners dared to contradict, and with good reason, "there are still some quite pretty things. But I confess that I prefer not to venture farther than the *Crépuscule*! And then in the finer poems of Victor Hugo, and there really are some, one frequently comes across an idea, even a profound idea." And with the right shade of sentiment, bringing out the sorrowful thought with the full strength of her intonation, planting it somewhere beyond the sound of her voice, and fixing straight in front of her a charming, dreamy gaze, the Duchess said slowly: "Take this:

La douleur est un fruit, Dieu ne le fait pas croître
Sur la branche trop faible encor pour le porter.

Or, better still:

Les morts durent bien peu.
Hélas, dans le cercueil ils tombent en poussière
Moins vite qu'en nos cœurs!"

And, while a smile of disillusionment contracted with a graceful undulation her sorrowing lips, the Duchess fastened on Mme. d'Arpajon the dreaming gaze of her charming, clear blue eyes. I was beginning to know them, as well as her voice, with its heavy drawl, its harsh savour. In those eyes and in that voice, I recognised much of the life of nature round Combray. Certainly, in the affectation with which that voice brought into prominence at times a rudeness of the soil there was more than one element: the wholly provincial origin of one branch of the Guermantes family, which had for long remained more localised, more hardy, wilder, more provoking than the rest; and also the usage of really distinguished people, and of witty people who know that distinction does not consist in mincing speech, and the usage of nobles who fraternise more readily with their peasants than with the middle classes; peculiarities all of which the regal position of Mme. de Guermantes enabled her to display more easily, to bring out with every sail spread. It appears that the same voice existed also in certain of her sisters whom she detested, and who, less intelligent than herself and almost plebeianly married, if one may coin this adverb to speak of unions with obscure noblemen, entrenched on their provincial estates, or, in Paris, in a Faubourg Saint-Germain of no brilliance, possessed this voice also but had bridled it, corrected it, softened it so far as lay in their power, just as it is very rarely that any of us presumes on his own originality and does not apply himself diligently to copying the most approved models. But Oriane was so much more intelligent, so much richer, above all, so much more in fashion than her sisters, she had so effectively, when Princesse des Laumes, behaved just as she pleased in the company of the Prince of Wales, that she had realised that this discordant voice was an attraction, and had made of it, in the social order, with the courage of originality rewarded by success, what in the theatrical order a Réjane, a Jeanne Granier (which implies no comparison, naturally, between the respective merits and talents of those two actresses) had made of theirs, something admirable and distinctive which possibly certain Réjane and Granier sisters, whom no one has ever known, strove to conceal as a defect.

To all these reasons for displaying her local originality, the favourite writers of Mme. de Guermantes—Mérimée, Meilhac and Halévy—had brought in addition, with the respect for what was natural, a feeling for the prosaic by which she attained to poetry and a spirit purely of society which called up distant landscapes before my eyes. Besides, the Duchess was fully capable, adding to these influences an artistic research of her own, of having chosen for the majority of her words the pronunciation that seemed to her most 'Ile de France,' most 'Champenoise,' since, if not quite to the same extent as her sister-in-law Marsantes, she rarely used anything but the pure vocabulary that might have been employed by an old French writer. And when one was tired of the composite patchwork of modern speech, it was, albeit one was aware that she expressed far fewer ideas, a thorough relaxation to listen to the talk of Mme. de Guermantes—almost the same feeling, if one was alone with her and she restrained and clarified still further her flow of words, as one has on hearing an old song. Then, as I looked at, as I listened to Mme. de Guermantes, I could see, a prisoner in the perpetual and quiet afternoon of her eyes, a sky of the Ile de France or of Champagne spread itself, grey-blue, oblique, with the same angle of inclination as in the eyes of Saint-Loup.

Thus, by these several formations, Mme. de Guermantes expressed at once the most ancient aristocratic France, then, from a far later source, the manner in which the Duchesse de Broglie might have enjoyed and found fault with Victor Hugo under the July Monarchy, and, finally, a keen taste for the literature that sprang from Mérimée and Meilhac. The first of these formations attracted me more than the second, did more to console me for the disappointments of my pilgrimage to and arrival in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, so different from what I had imagined it to be; but even the second I preferred to the last. For, so long as Mme. de Guermantes was being, almost spontaneously, a Guermantes and nothing more, her Pailleronism, her taste for the younger Dumas were reflected and deliberate. As this taste was the opposite of my own, she was productive, to my mind, of literature when she talked to me of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and never seemed to me so stupidly Faubourg Saint-Germain as when she was talking literature.

Moved by this last quotation, Mme. d'Arpajon exclaimed: " '*Ces reliques du cœur ont aussi leur poussière!*'—Sir, you must write that down for me on my fan," she said to M. de Guermantes. "Poor woman, I feel sorry for her!" said the Princesse de Parme to Mme. de Guermantes. "No, really, Ma'am, you must not be soft-hearted, she has only got what she deserves." "But—you'll forgive me for saying this to you—she does really love him all the same!" "Oh, not at all; she isn't capable of it; she thinks she loves him just as she thought just now she was quoting Victor Hugo, when she repeated a line from Musset. Listen," the Duchess went on in a tone of melancholy, "nobody would be more touched than myself by any true sentiment. But let me give you an instance. Only yesterday, she made a terrible scene with Basin. Your Highness thinks perhaps that it was because he's in love with other women, because he no longer loves her; not in the least, it was because he won't put her sons down for the Jockey. Does Ma'am call that the behaviour of a woman in love? No; I will go farther;" Mme. de Guermantes added with precision, "she is a person of singular insensibility." Meanwhile it was with an eye sparkling with satisfaction that M. de Guermantes had listened to his wife talking about Victor Hugo 'point-blank' and quoting his poetry. The Duchess might frequently annoy him; at moments like this he was proud of her. "Oriane is really extraordinary. She can talk about anything, she has read everything. She could not possibly have guessed that the conversation this evening would turn on Victor Hugo. Whatever subject you take up, she is ready for you, she can hold her own with the most learned scholars. This young man must be quite captivated."

"Do let us change the conversation," Mme. de Guermantes went on, "because she's dreadfully susceptible. You will think me quite old-fashioned," she began, turning to me. "I know that nowadays it's considered a weakness to care for ideas in poetry, poetry with some thought in it." "Old-fashioned?" asked the Princesse de Parme, quivering with the slight thrill sent through her by this new wave which she had not expected, albeit she knew that the conversation of the Duchesse de Guermantes always held in store for her these continuous and delightful shocks, that breath-catching panic, that wholesome exhaustion after which her thoughts instinctively turned to the necessity of taking a footbath in a dressing cabin and a brisk walk to 'restore her circulation.'

"For my part, no, Oriane," said Mme. de Brissac, "I don't in the least object to Victor Hugo's having ideas, quite the contrary, but I do object to his seeking for them in sheer monstrosities. After all, it was he who accustomed us to ugliness in literature. There are quite enough ugly things already in real life. Why can't we be allowed at least to forget it while we are reading. A distressing spectacle, from which we should turn away in real life, that is what attracts Victor Hugo."

"Victor Hugo is not as realistic as Zola though, surely?" asked the Princesse de Parme. The name of Zola did not stir a muscle on the face of M. de Beautreillis. The General's anti-Dreyfusism was too deep-rooted for him to seek to give expression to it. And his good-natured silence when anyone broached these topics moved the profane heart as a proof of the same delicacy that a priest shews in avoiding any reference to your religious duties, a financier when he takes care not to recommend your investing in the companies which he himself controls, a strong man when he behaves with lamblike gentleness and does not hit you in the jaw. "I know you're related to Admiral Jurien de la Gravière," was murmured to me with an air of connivance by Mme. de Varambon, the lady in waiting to the Princesse de Parme, an excellent but limited woman, procured for the Princess in the past by the Duke's mother. She had not previously uttered a word to me, and I could never afterwards, despite the admonitions of the Princess and my own protestations, get out of her mind the idea that I was in some way connected with the Academician Admiral, who was a complete stranger to me. The obstinate persistence of the Princesse de Parme's lady in waiting in seeing in me a nephew of Admiral Jurien de la Gravière was in itself quite an ordinary form of silliness. But the mistake she made was only a crowning instance of all the other mistakes, less serious, more elaborate, unconscious or deliberate, which accompany one's name on the label which society writes out and attaches to one. I remember that a friend of the Guermantes who had expressed a keen desire to meet me gave me as the reason that I was a great friend of his cousin, Mme. de Chaussegros. "She is a charming person, she's so fond of you." I scrupulously, though quite vainly, insisted on the fact that there must be some mistake, as I did not know Mme. de Chaussegros. "Then it's her sister you know; it comes to the same thing. She met you in Scotland." I had never been in Scotland, and took the futile precaution, in my honesty, of letting my informant know this. It was Mme. de Chaussegros herself who had said that she knew me, and no doubt sincerely believed it, as a result of some initial confusion, for from that time onwards she never failed to hold out her hand to me whenever she saw me. And as, after all, the world in which I moved was precisely that in which Mme. de Chaussegros moved my modesty had neither rhyme nor reason. To say that I was intimate with the Chaussegros was, literally, a mistake, but from the social point of view was to state an equivalent of my position, if one can speak of the social position of so young a man as I then was. It therefore mattered not in the least that this friend of the Guermantes should tell me only things that were false about myself, he neither lowered nor exalted me (from the worldly point of view) in the idea which he continued to hold of me. And when all is said, for those of us who are not professional actors the tedium of living always in the same character is removed for a moment, as if we were to go on the boards, when another person forms a false idea of us, imagines that we are friends with a lady whom we do not know and are reported to have met in the course of a delightful tour of a foreign country which we have never made. Errors that multiply themselves and are harmless when they have not the inflexible rigidity of this one which had been committed, and continued for the rest of her life to be committed, in spite of my denials, by the imbecile lady in waiting to Mme. de Parme, rooted for all time in the belief that I was related to the tiresome Admiral Jurien de la Gravière. "She is not very strong in her head," the Duke confided to me, "and besides, she ought not to indulge in too many libations. I fancy, she's slightly under the influence of Bacchus." As a matter of fact Mme. de Varambon had drunk nothing but water, but the Duke liked to find scope for his favourite figures of speech. "But Zola is not a realist, Ma'am, he's a poet!" said Mme. de Guermantes, drawing inspiration from the critical essays which she had read in recent years and adapting them to her own personal genius. Agreeably buffeted hitherto, in the course of this bath of wit, a bath stirred for herself, which she was taking this evening and which, she considered, must be particularly good for her health, letting herself be swept away by the waves of paradox which curled and broke one after another, before this, the most enormous of them all, the Princesse de Parme jumped for fear of being knocked over. And it was in a choking voice, as though she were quite out of breath, that she now gasped: "Zola a poet!" "Why, yes," answered the Duchess with a laugh, entranced by this display of suffocation. "Your Highness must have remarked how he magnifies everything he touches. You will tell me that he touches just what—perish the thought! But he makes it into something colossal. His is the epic dungheap. He is the Homer of the sewers! He has not enough capitals to print Cambronne's word." Despite the extreme exhaustion which she was beginning to feel, the Princess was enchanted; never had she felt better. She would not have exchanged for an invitation to Schönbrunn, albeit that was the one thing that really flattered her, these divine dinner-parties at Mme. de Guermantes's, made invigorating by so liberal a dose of attic salt. "He writes it with a big C," cried Mme. d'Arpajon. "Surely with a big M, I think, my dear," replied Mme. de Guermantes, exchanging first with her husband a merry glance which implied: "Did you ever hear such an idiot?" "Wait a minute, now." Mme. de Guermantes turned to me, fixing on me a tender, smiling gaze, because, as an accomplished hostess, she was anxious to display her own knowledge of the artist who interested me specially, to give me, if I required it, an opportunity for exhibiting mine. "Wait," she urged me, gently waving her feather fan, so conscious was she at this moment that she was performing in full the duties of hospitality, and, that she might be found wanting in none of them, making a sign also to the servants to help me to more of the asparagus and *mousseline* sauce: "wait, now, I do believe that Zola has actually written an essay on Elstir, the painter whose things you were looking at just now—the only ones of his, really, that I care for," she concluded. As a matter of fact she hated Elstir's work, but found a unique quality in anything that was in her own house. I asked M. de Guermantes if he knew the name of the gentleman in the tall hat who figured in the picture of the crowd and whom I recognised as the same person whose portrait the Guermantes also had and had hung beside the other, both dating more or less from the same early period in which Elstir's personality was not yet completely established and he derived a certain inspiration from Manet. "Good Lord, yes," he replied, "I know it's a fellow who is quite well-known and no fool either, in his own line, but I have no head for names. I have it on the tip of my tongue, Monsieur . . . . Monsieur . . . . oh, well, it doesn't matter, I can't remember it. Swann would be able to tell you, it was he who made Mme. de Guermantes buy all that stuff; she is always too good-natured, afraid of hurting people's feelings if she refuses to do things; between ourselves, I believe he's landed us with a lot of rubbish. What I can tell you is that the gentleman you mean has been a sort of Maecenas to M. Elstir, he started him and has often helped him out of tight places by ordering pictures from him. As a compliment to this man—if you can call that sort of thing a compliment—he has painted him standing about among that crowd, where with his Sunday-go-to-meeting look he creates a distinctly odd effect. He may be a big gun in his own way but he is evidently not aware of the proper time and place for a top hat. With that thing on his head, among all those bare-headed girls, he looks like a little country lawyer on the razzle-dazzle. But tell me, you seem quite gone on his pictures. If I had only known, I should have got up the subject properly. Not that there's any need to rack one's brains over the meaning of M. Elstir's work, as one would for Ingres's *Source* or the *Princes in the Tower* by Paul Delaroche. What one appreciates in his work is that it's shrewdly observed, amusing, Parisian, and then one passes on to the next thing. One doesn't need to be an expert to look at that sort of thing. I know of course that they're merely sketches, still, I don't feel myself that he puts enough work into them. Swann was determined that we should buy a *Bundle of Asparagus*. In fact it was in the house for several days. There was nothing else in the picture, a bundle of asparagus exactly like what you're eating now. But I must say I declined to swallow M. Elstir's asparagus. He asked three hundred francs for them. Three hundred francs for a bundle of asparagus. A louis, that's as much as they're worth, even if they are out of season. I thought it a bit stiff. When he puts real people into his pictures as well, there's something rather caddish, something detrimental about him which does not appeal to me. I am surprised to see a delicate mind, a superior brain like yours admire that sort of thing." "I don't know why you should say that, Basin," interrupted the Duchess, who did not like to hear people run down anything that her rooms contained. "I am by no means prepared to admit that there's nothing distinguished in Elstir's pictures. You have to take it or leave it. But it's not always lacking in talent. And you must admit that the ones I bought are singularly beautiful." "Well, Oriane, in that style of thing I'd a thousand times rather have the little study by M. Vibert we saw at the water-colour exhibition.

There's nothing much in it, if you like, you could take it in the palm of your hand, but you can see the man's clever through and through: that unwashed scarecrow of a missionary standing before the sleek prelate who is making his little dog do tricks, it's a perfect little poem of subtlety, and in fact goes really deep." "I believe you know M. Elstir," the Duchess went on to me, "as a man, he's quite pleasant." "He is intelligent," said the Duke; "one is surprised, when one talks to him, that his painting should be so vulgar." "He is more than intelligent, he is really quite clever," said the Duchess in the confidently critical tone of a person who knew what she was talking about. "Didn't he once start a portrait of you, Oriane?" asked the Princesse de Parme. "Yes, in shrimp pink," replied Mme. de Guermantes, "but that's not going to hand his name down to posterity. It's a ghastly thing; Basin wanted to have it destroyed." This last statement was one which Mme. de Guermantes often made. But at other times her appreciation of the picture was different: "I do not care for his painting, but he did once do a good portrait of me." The former of these judgments was addressed as a rule to people who spoke to the Duchess of her portrait, the other to those who did not refer to it and whom therefore she was anxious to inform of its existence. The former was inspired in her by coquetry, the latter by vanity. "Make a portrait of you look ghastly! Why, then it can't be a portrait, it's a falsehood; I don't know one end of a brush from the other, but I'm sure if I were to paint you, merely putting you down as I see you, I should produce a masterpiece," said the Princesse de Parme ingenuously. "He sees me probably as I see myself, without any allurements," said the Duchesse de Guermantes, with the look, melancholy, modest and coaxing, which seemed to her best calculated to make her appear different from what Elstir had portrayed. "That portrait ought to appeal to Mme. de Gallardon," said the Duke. "Because she knows nothing about pictures?" asked the Princesse de Parme, who knew that Mme. de Guermantes had an infinite contempt for her cousin. "But she's a very good woman, isn't she?" The Duke assumed an air of profound astonishment. "Why, Basin, don't you see the Princess is making fun of you?" (The Princess had never dreamed of doing such a thing.) "She knows as well as you do that Gallardonette is an old *poison*," went on Mme. de Guermantes, whose vocabulary, limited as a rule to all these old expressions, was as savoury as those dishes which it is possible to come across in the delicious books of Pampille, but which have in real life become so rare, dishes where the jellies, the butter, the gravy, the quails are all genuine, permit of no alloy, where even the salt is brought specially from the salt-marshes of Brittany; from her accent, her choice of words, one felt that the basis of the Duchess's conversation came directly from Guermantes. In this way the Duchess differed profoundly from her nephew Saint-Loup, the prey of so many new ideas and expressions; it is difficult, when one's mind is troubled by the ideas of Kant and the longings of Baudelaire, to write the exquisite French of Henri IV, which meant that the very purity of the Duchess's language was a sign of limitation, and that, in her, both her intelligence and her sensibility had remained proof against all innovation. Here again, Mme.

de Guermantes's mind attracted me just because of what it excluded (which was exactly the content of my own thoughts) and by everything which, by virtue of that exclusion, it had been able to preserve, that seductive vigour of the supple bodies which no exhausting necessity to think, no moral anxiety or nervous trouble has deformed. Her mind, of a formation so anterior to my own, was for me the equivalent of what had been offered me by the procession of the girls of the little band along the seashore. Mme. de Guermantes offered me, domesticated and held in subjection by her natural courtesy, by the respect due to another person's intellectual worth, all the energy and charm of a cruel little girl of one of the noble families round Combray who from her childhood had been brought up in the saddle, tortured cats, gouged out the eyes of rabbits, and, albeit she had remained a pillar of virtue, might equally well have been, a good few years ago now, the most brilliant mistress of the Prince de Sagan. Only she was incapable of realising what I had sought for in her, the charm of her historic name, and the tiny quantity of it that I had found in her, a rustic survival from Guermantes. Were our relations founded upon a misunderstanding which could not fail to become manifest as soon as my homage, instead of being addressed to the relatively superior woman that she believed herself to be, should be diverted to some other woman of equal mediocrity and breathing the same unconscious charm? A misunderstanding so entirely natural, and one that will always exist between a young dreamer like myself and a woman of the world, one however that profoundly disturbs him, so long as he has not yet discovered the nature of his imaginative faculties and has not acquired his share of the inevitable disappointments which he is destined to find in people, as in the theatre, in his travels and indeed in love. M. de Guermantes having declared (following upon Elstir's asparagus and those that were brought round after the *financière* chicken) that green asparagus grown in the open air, which, as has been so quaintly said by the charming writer who signs himself E. de Clermont-Tonnerre, "have not the impressive rigidity of their sisters," ought to be eaten with eggs: "One man's meat is another man's poison, as they say," replied M. de Bréauté. "In the province of Canton, in China, the greatest delicacy that can be set before one is a dish of ortolan's eggs completely rotten." M. de Bréauté, the author of an essay on the Mormons which had appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, moved in none but the most aristocratic circles, but among these visited only such as had a certain reputation for intellect, with the result that from his presence, were it at all regular, in a woman's house one could tell that she had a 'salon.' He pretended to a loathing of society, and assured each of his duchesses in turn that it was for the sake of her wit and beauty that he came to see her. They all believed him. Whenever, with death in his heart, he resigned himself to attending a big party at the Princesse de Parme's, he summoned them all to accompany him, to keep up his courage, and thus appeared only to be moving in the midst of an intimate group. So that his reputation as an intellectual might survive his worldly success, applying certain maxims of the Guermantes spirit, he would set out with ladies of fashion on long scientific expeditions at the height of the dancing season, and when a woman who was a snob, and consequently still without any definite position, began to go everywhere, he would put a savage obstinacy into his refusal to know her, to allow himself to be introduced to her. His hatred of snobs was a derivative of his snobbishness, but made the simpletons (in other words, everyone) believe that he was immune from snobbishness. "Babal always knows everything," exclaimed the Duchesse de Guermantes. "I think it must be charming, a country where you can be quite sure that your dairyman will supply you with really rotten eggs, eggs of the year of the comet. I can see myself dipping my bread and butter in them. I must say, you get the same thing at aunt Madeleine's" (Mme. de Villeparisis's) "where everything's served in a state of putrefaction, eggs included." Then, as Mme. d'Arpajon protested, "But my dear Phili, you know it as well as I do. You can see the chicken in the egg. What I can't understand is how they manage not to fall out. It's not an omelette you get there, it's a poultry-yard. You were so wise not to come to dinner there yesterday, there was a brill cooked in carbolic! I assure you, it wasn't a dinner-table, it was far more like an operating-table. Really, Norpois carries loyalty to the pitch of heroism. He actually asked for more!" "I believe I saw you at dinner there the time she made that attack on M. Bloch" (M. de Guermantes, perhaps to give to an Israelite name a more foreign sound, pronounced the 'ch' in Bloch not like a 'k' but as in the German 'hoch') "when he said about some poit" (poet) "or other that he was sublime. Châtellerault did his best to break M. Bloch's shins, the fellow didn't understand in the least and thought my nephew's kick was aimed at a young woman sitting opposite him." (At this point, M. de Guermantes coloured slightly.) "He did not realise that he was annoying our aunt by his 'sublimes' chucked about all over the place like that. In short, aunt Madeleine, who doesn't keep her tongue in her pocket, turned on him with: 'Indeed, Sir, and what epithet do you keep for M. de Bousset?' " (M. de Guermantes thought that, when one mentioned a famous name, the use of 'Monsieur' and a particle was eminently 'old school.') "That put him in his place, all right." "And what answer did this M. Bloch make?" came in a careless tone from Mme. de Guermantes, who, running short for the moment of original ideas, felt that she must copy her husband's teutonic pronunciation. "Ah! I can assure you, M. Bloch did not wait for any more, he's still running." "Yes, I remember quite well seeing you there that evening," said Mme. de Guermantes with emphasis as though, coming from her, there must be something in this reminiscence highly flattering to myself. "It is always so interesting at my aunt's. At the last party she gave, which was, of course, when I met you, I meant to ask you whether that old gentleman who went past where we were sitting wasn't François Coppée. You must know who everyone is," she went on, sincerely envious of my relations with poets and poetry, and also out of 'consideration' for myself, the wish to establish in a better position in the eyes of her other guests a young man so well versed in literature. I assured the Duchess that I had not observed any celebrities at Mme. de Villeparisis's party. "What!" she replied with a bewilderment which revealed that her respect for men of letters and her contempt for society were more superficial than she said, perhaps even than she thought, "What! There were no famous authors there! You astonish me! Why, I saw all sorts of quite impossible people!" I remembered the evening in question distinctly owing to an entirely trivial incident that had occurred at the party. Mme. de Villeparisis had introduced Bloch to Mme. Alphonse de Rothschild, but my friend had not caught the name and, thinking he was talking to an old English lady who was a trifle mad, had replied only in monosyllables to the garrulous conversation of the historic beauty, when Mme. de Villeparisis in making her known to some one else uttered, quite distinctly this time: "The Baronne Alphonse de Rothschild." Thereupon there had coursed suddenly and simultaneously through Bloch's arteries so many ideas of millions and of social importance, which it would have been more prudent to subdivide and separate, that he had undergone, so to speak, a momentary failure of heart and brain alike, and cried aloud in the dear old lady's presence: "If I'd only known!" an exclamation the silliness of which kept him from sleeping for at least a week afterwards. His remark was of no great interest, but I remembered it as a proof that sometimes in this life, under the stress of an exceptional emotion, people do say what is in their minds. "I fancy Mme. de Villeparisis is not absolutely . . . moral," said the Princesse de Parme, who knew that the best people did not visit the Duchess's aunt, and, from what the Duchess herself had just been saying, that one might speak freely about her. But, Mme. de Guermantes not seeming to approve of this criticism, she hastened to add: "Though, of course, intellect carried to that degree excuses everything." "But you take the same view of my aunt that everyone else does," replied the Duchess, "which is, really, quite mistaken. It's just what Mémé was saying to me only yesterday." She blushed; a reminiscence unknown to me filmed her eyes. I formed the supposition that M. de Charlus had asked her to cancel my invitation, as he had sent Robert to ask me not to go to her house. I had the impression that the blush—equally incomprehensible to me—which had tinged the Duke's cheek when he made some reference to his brother could not be attributed to the same cause. "My poor aunt—she will always have the reputation of being a lady of the old school, of sparkling wit and uncontrolled passions. And really there's no more middle-class, serious, commonplace mind in Paris. She will go down as a patron of the arts, which means to say that she was once the mistress of a great painter, though he was never able to make her understand what a picture was; and as for her private life, so far from being a depraved woman, she was so much made for marriage, so conjugal from her cradle that, not having succeeded in keeping a husband, who incidentally was a cad, she has never had a love-affair which she hasn't taken just as seriously as if it were holy matrimony, with the same susceptibilities, the same quarrels, the same fidelity. By which token, those relations are often the most sincere; you'll find, in fact, more inconsolable lovers than husbands." "Yet, Oriane, if you take the case of your brother-in-law Palamède you were speaking about just now; no mistress in the world could ever dream of being mourned as that poor Mme. de Charlus has been." "Ah!" replied the Duchess, "Your Highness must permit me to be not altogether of her opinion. People don't all like to be mourned in the same way, each of us has his preferences." "Still, he did make a regular cult of her after her death. It is true that people sometimes do for the dead what they would not have done for the living." "For one thing," retorted Mme. de Guermantes in a dreamy tone which belied her teasing purpose, "we go to their funerals, which we never do for the living!" M. de Guermantes gave a sly glance at M. de Bréauté as though to provoke him into laughter at the Duchess's wit. "At the same time I frankly admit," went on Mme. de Guermantes, "that the manner in which I should like to be mourned by a man I loved would not be that adopted by my brother-in-law." The Duke's face darkened. He did not like to hear his wife utter rash judgments, especially about M. de Charlus. "You are very particular. His grief set an example to everyone," he reproved her stiffly. But the Duchess had in dealing with her husband that sort of boldness which animal tamers shew, or people who live with a madman and are not afraid of making him angry. "Oh, very well, just as you like—he does set an example, I never said he didn't, he goes every day to the cemetery to tell her how many people he has had to luncheon, he misses her enormously, but—as he'd mourn for a cousin, a grandmother, a sister. It is not the grief of a husband. It is true that they were a pair of saints, which makes it all rather exceptional." M. de Guermantes, infuriated by his wife's chatter, fixed on her with a terrible immobility a pair of eyes already loaded. "I don't wish to say anything against poor Mémé, who, by the way, could not come this evening," went on the Duchess, "I quite admit there's no one like him, he's delightful; he has a delicacy, a warmth of heart that you don't as a rule find in men. He has a woman's heart, Mémé has!" "What you say is absurd," M. de Guermantes broke in sharply. "There's nothing effeminate about Mémé, I know nobody so manly as he is." "But I am not suggesting that he's the least bit in the world effeminate. Do at least take the trouble to understand what I say," retorted the Duchess. "He's always like that the moment anyone mentions his brother," she added, turning to the Princesse de Parme. "It's very charming, it's a pleasure to hear him. There's nothing so nice as two brothers who are fond of each other," replied the Princess, as many a humbler person might have replied, for it is possible to belong to a princely race by birth and at the same time to be mentally affiliated to a race that is thoroughly plebeian.

"As we're discussing your family, Oriane," said the Princess, "I saw your nephew Saint-Loup yesterday; I believe he wants to ask you to do something for him." The Duc de Guermantes bent his Olympian brow. When he did not himself care to do a service, he preferred his wife not to assume the responsibility for it, knowing that it would come to the same thing in the end and that the people to whom the Duchess would be obliged to apply would put this concession down to the common account of the household, just as much as if it had been asked of them by the husband alone. "Why didn't he tell me about it himself?" said the Duchess. "He was here yesterday and stayed a couple of hours, and heaven only knows what a bore he managed to make himself. He would be no stupider than anyone else if he had only the sense, like many people we know, to be content with being a fool. It's his veneer of knowledge that's so terrible. He wants to preserve an open mind—open to all the things he doesn't understand. He talks to you about Morocco. It's appalling."

"He can't go back there, because of Rachel," said the Prince de Foix. "Surely, now that they've broken it off," interrupted M. de Bréauté. "So far from breaking it off, I found her a couple of days ago in Robert's rooms, they didn't look at all like people who'd quarrelled, I can assure you," replied the Prince de Foix, who loved to spread abroad every rumour that could damage Robert's chances of marrying, and might for that matter have been misled by one of the intermittent resumptions of a connexion that was practically at an end.

"That Rachel was speaking to me about you, I see her like that in the mornings, on the way to the Champs-Elysées; she's a kind of head-in-air, as you say, what you call 'unlaced,' a sort of 'Dame aux Camélias,' only figuratively speaking, of course." This speech was addressed to me by Prince Von, who liked always to appear conversant with French literature and Parisian catchwords.

"Why, that's just what it was—Morocco!" exclaimed the Princess, flinging herself into this opening. "What on earth can he want in Morocco?" asked M. de Guermantes sternly; "Oriane can do absolutely nothing for him there, as he knows perfectly well." "He thinks he invented strategy," Mme. de Guermantes pursued the theme, "and then he uses impossible words for the most trivial things, which doesn't prevent him from making blots all over his letters. The other day he announced that he'd been given some *sublime* potatoes, and that he'd taken a *sublime* stage box." "He speaks Latin," the Duke went one better. "What! Latin?" the Princesse gasped. " 'Pon my soul he does! Ma'am can ask Oriane if I'm not telling the truth." "Why, of course, Ma'am; the other day he said to us straight out, without stopping to think: 'I know of no more touching example of *sic transit gloria mundi*.' I can repeat the phrase now to your Highness because, after endless inquiries and by appealing to *linguists*, we succeeded in reconstructing it, but Robert flung it out without pausing for breath, one could hardly make out that there was Latin in it, he was just like a character in the *Malade Imaginaire*. And all this referred simply to the death of the Empress of Austria!" "Poor woman!" cried the Princess, "what a delicious creature she was." "Yes," replied the Duchess, "a trifle mad, a trifle headstrong, but she was a thoroughly good woman, a nice, kind-hearted lunatic; the only thing I could never make out about her was why she had never managed to get her teeth made to fit her; they always came loose half-way through a sentence and she was obliged to stop short or she'd have swallowed them." "That Rachel was speaking to me about you, she told me that young Saint-Loup worshipped you, that he was fonder of you than he was of her," said Prince Von to me, devouring his food like an ogre as he spoke, his face scarlet, his teeth bared by his perpetual grin. "But in that case she must be jealous of me and hate me," said I. "Not at all, she told me all sorts of nice things about you. The Prince de Foix's mistress would perhaps be jealous if he preferred you to her. You don't understand? Come home with me, and I'll explain it all to you." "I'm afraid I can't, I'm going on to M. de Charlus at eleven."

"Why, he sent round to me yesterday to ask me to dine with him this evening, but told me not to come after a quarter to eleven. But if you must go to him, at least come with me as far as the Théâtre Français, you will be in the periphery," said the Prince, who thought doubtless that this last word meant 'proximity' or possibly 'centre.'

But the bulging eyes in his coarse though handsome red face frightened me and I declined, saying that a friend was coming to call for me. This reply seemed to me in no way offensive. The Prince, however, apparently formed a different impression of it for he did not say another word to me.

"I really must go and see the Queen of Naples; what a grief it must be to her," said (or at least appeared to me to have said) the Princesse de Parme. For her words had come to me only indistinctly through the intervening screen of those addressed to me, albeit in an undertone, by Prince Von, who had doubtless been afraid, if he spoke louder, of being overheard by the Prince de Foix. "Oh, dear, no!" replied the Duchess, "I don't believe it has been any grief at all." "None at all! You do always fly to extremes so, Oriane," said M. de Guermantes, resuming his part of the cliff which by standing up to the wave forces it to fling higher its crest of foam. "Basin knows even better than I that I'm telling the truth," replied the Duchess, "but he thinks he's obliged to look severe because you are present, Ma'am, and he's afraid of my shocking you." "Oh, please, no, I beg of you," cried the Princesse de Parme, dreading the slightest alteration on her account of these delicious Fridays at the Duchesse de Guermantes's, this forbidden fruit which the Queen of Sweden herself had not yet acquired the right to taste. "Why, it was Basin himself that she told, when he said to her with a duly sorrowful expression: 'But the Queen is in mourning; for whom, pray, is it a great grief to your Majesty?'—'No, it's not a deep mourning, it's a light mourning, quite a light mourning, it's my sister.' The truth is, she's delighted about it, as Basin knows perfectly well, she invited us to a party that very evening, and gave me two pearls. I wish she could lose a sister every day! So far from weeping for her sister's death, she was in fits of laughter over it. She probably says to herself, like Robert, '*sic transit*——' I forget how it goes on," she added modestly, knowing how it went on perfectly well.

In saying all this Mme. de Guermantes was only being witty, and with complete insincerity, for the Queen of Naples, like the Duchesse d'Alençon, also doomed to a tragic fate, had the warmest heart in the world and mourned quite sincerely for her kinsfolk. Mme. de Guermantes knew those noble Bavarian sisters, her cousins, too well not to be aware of this. "He would like not to go back to Morocco," said the Princesse de Parme, alighting hurriedly again upon the perch of Robert's name which had been held out to her, quite unintentionally, by Mme. de Guermantes. "I believe you know General de Monserfeuil." "Very slightly," replied the Duchess, who was an intimate friend of the officer in question. The Princess explained what it was that Saint-Loup wanted. "Good gracious, yes, if I see him—it is possible that I may meet him," the Duchess replied, so as not to appear to be refusing, the occasions of her meeting General de Monserfeuil seeming to extend rapidly farther apart as soon as it became a question of her asking him for anything. This uncertainty did not, however, satisfy the Duke, who interrupted his wife: "You know perfectly well you won't be seeing him, Oriane, and besides you have already asked him for two things which he hasn't done. My wife has a passion for doing good turns to people," he went on, growing more and more furious, in order to force the Princess to withdraw her request, without there being any question made of his wife's good nature and so that Mme. de Parme should throw the blame back upon his own character, which was essentially obstructive. "Robert could get anything he wanted out of Monserfeuil. Only, as he happens not to know himself what he wants, he gets us to ask for it because he knows there's no better way of making the whole thing fall through. Oriane has asked too many favours of Monserfeuil. A request from her now would be a reason for him to refuse." "Oh, in that case, it would be better if the Duchess did nothing," said Mme. de Parme. "Obviously!" the Duke closed the discussion. "Poor General, he's been defeated again at the elections," said the Princess, so as to turn the conversation from Robert. "Oh, it's nothing serious, it's only the seventh time," said the Duke, who, having been obliged himself to retire from politics, quite enjoyed hearing of other people's failures at the polls. "He has consoled himself by giving his wife another baby." "What! Is that poor Mme. de Monserfeuil in an interesting condition again?" cried the Princess. "Why, of course," replied the Duke, "that's the one division where the poor General has never failed to get in."

In the period that followed I was continually to be invited, were it with a small party only, to these repasts at which I had at one time imagined the guests as seated like the Apostles in the Sainte-Chapelle. They did assemble there indeed, like the early Christians, not to partake merely of a material nourishment, which incidentally was exquisite, but in a sort of social Eucharist; so that in the course of a few dinner-parties I assimilated the acquaintance of all the friends of my hosts, friends to whom they presented me with a shade of benevolent patronage so marked (as a person for whom they had always had a sort of parental affection) that there was not one among them who would not have felt himself to be failing in his duty to the Duke and Duchess if he had given a ball without including my name on his list, and at the same time, while I sipped one of those Yquems which lay concealed in the Guermantes cellars, I tasted ortolans dressed according to each of the different recipes which the Duke himself used to elaborate and modified with prudence. However, for one who had already set his knees more than once beneath the mystic board, the consumption of the latter was not indispensable. Old friends of M. and Mme. de Guermantes came in to see them after dinner, 'with the tooth-picks,' as Mme. Swann would have said, without being expected, and took in winter a cup of *tilleul* in the lighted warmth of the great drawing-room, in summer a glass of orangeade in the darkness of the little rectangular strip of garden outside. There was no record of anything else, among the Guermantes, in these evenings in the garden, but orangeade. It had a sort of ritual meaning. To have added other refreshments would have seemed to be falsifying the tradition, just as a big at-home in the Faubourg Saint-Germain ceases to be an at-home if there is a play also, or music. You must be supposed to have come simply—though there be five hundred of you—to pay a call on, let us say, the Princesse de Guermantes. People marvelled at my influence because I was able to procure the addition to this orangeade of a jug containing the juice of stewed cherries or stewed pears. I took a dislike on this account to the Prince d'Agrigente, who was like all the people who, lacking in imagination but not in covetousness, take a keen interest in what one is drinking and ask if they may taste a little of it themselves. Which meant that, every time, M. d'Agrigente, by diminishing my ration, spoiled my pleasure. For this fruit juice can never be provided in sufficient quantities to quench one's thirst for it. Nothing is less cloying than these transpositions into flavour of the colour of a fruit which when cooked seems to have travelled backwards to the past season of its blossoming. Blushing like an orchard in spring, or, it may be, colourless and cool like the zephyr beneath the fruit-trees, the juice lets itself be breathed and gazed into one drop by drop, and M. d'Agrigente prevented me, regularly, from taking my fill of it. Despite these distillations the traditional orangeade persisted like the *tilleul*. In these humble kinds, the social communion was none the less administered. In this respect, doubtless, the friends of M. and Mme. de Guermantes had, after all, as I had originally imagined, remained more different from the rest of humanity than their outward appearance might have misled me into supposing. Numbers of elderly men came to receive from the Duchess, together with the invariable drink, a welcome that was often far from cordial. Now this could not have been due to snobbishness, they themselves being of a rank to which there was none superior; nor to love of splendour; they did love it perhaps, but on less stringent social conditions might have been enjoying a glittering example of it, for on these same evenings the charming wife of a colossally rich financier would have given anything in the world to have them among the brilliant shooting-party she was giving for a couple of days for the King of Spain. They had nevertheless declined her invitation, and had come round without fail to inquire whether Mme. de Guermantes was at home. They were not even certain of finding there opinions that conformed entirely with their own, or sentiments of any great warmth; Mme. de Guermantes let fall now and then, on the Dreyfus case, on the Republic, the Laws against Religion, or even in an undertone on themselves, their weaknesses, the dullness of their conversation, comments which they had to appear not to notice. No doubt, if they kept up their habit of coming there, it was owing to their superfine training as epicures in things worldly, to their clear consciousness of the prime and perfect quality of the social dish, with its familiar, reassuring, sappy savour, free from blend or taint, with the origin and history of which they were as well aware as she who served them with it, remaining more 'noble' in this respect than they themselves imagined. Now, on this occasion, among the visitors to whom I was introduced after dinner, it so happened that there was that General de Monserfeuil of whom the Princesse de Parme had been speaking, while Mme. de Guermantes, of whose drawing-room he was one of the regular frequenters, had not known that he was going to be there that evening.

He bowed before me, on hearing my name, as though I had been the President of the Supreme War Council. I had supposed it to be simply from some deep-rooted unwillingness to oblige, in which the Duke, as in wit if not in love, was his wife's accomplice, that the Duchess had practically refused to recommend her nephew to M. de Monserfeuil. And I saw in this an indifference all the more blameworthy in that I seemed to have gathered from a few words let fall by the Princess that Robert was in a post of danger from which it would be prudent to have him removed. But it was by the genuine malice of Mme. de Guermantes that I was revolted when, the Princesse de Parme having timidly suggested that she might say something herself and on her own responsibility to the General, the Duchess did everything in her power to dissuade her. "But Ma'am," she cried, "Monserfeuil has no sort of standing or influence whatever with the new Government. You would be wasting your breath." "I think he can hear us," murmured the Princess, as a hint to the Duchess not to speak so loud. Without lowering her voice: "Your Highness need not be afraid, he's as deaf as a post," said the Duchess, every word reaching the General distinctly. "The thing is, I believe M. de Saint-Loup is in a place that is not very safe," said the Princess. "What is one to do?" replied the Duchess. "He's in the same boat as everybody else, the only difference being that it was he who originally asked to be sent there. Besides, no, it's not really dangerous; if it was, you can imagine how anxious I should be to help. I should have spoken to Saint-Joseph about it during dinner. He has far more influence, and he's a real worker. But, as you see, he's gone now. Still, asking him would be less awkward than going to this one, who has three of his sons in Morocco just now and has refused to apply for them to be exchanged; he might raise that as an objection. Since your Highness insists on it, I shall speak to Saint-Joseph—if I see him again, or to Beautreillis. But if I don't see either of them, you mustn't waste your pity on Robert. It was explained to us the other day exactly where he is. I'm sure he couldn't wish for a better place."

"What a pretty flower, I've never seen one like it; there's no one like you, Oriane, for having such marvellous things in your house," said the Princesse de Parme, who, fearing that General de Monserfeuil might have overheard the Duchess, sought now to change the conversation. I looked and recognised a plant of the sort that I had watched Elstir painting. "I am so glad you like them; they are charming, do look at their little purple velvet collars; the only thing against them is—as may happen with people who are very pretty and very nicely dressed—they have a hideous name and a horrid smell. In spite of which I am very fond of them. But what is rather sad is that they are dying." "But they're growing in a pot, they aren't cut flowers," said the Princess. "No," answered the Duchess with a smile, "but it comes to the same thing, as they're all ladies. It's a kind of plant where the ladies and the gentlemen don't both grow on the same stalk. I'm like people who keep a lady dog. I have to find a husband for my flowers. Otherwise I shan't have any young ones!" "How very strange. Do you mean to say that in nature . . . ?" "Yes! There are certain insects whose duty it is to bring about the marriage, as they do with Sovereigns, by proxy, without the bride and bridegroom ever having set eyes on one another. And so, I assure you, I always tell my man to put my plant out in the window as often as possible, on the courtyard side and the garden side turn about, in the hope that the necessary insect will arrive. But the odds are too great. Fancy, he has first to have been seen by a person of the same species and the opposite sex, and he must then have taken it into his head to come and leave cards at the house. He hasn't appeared so far, I believe my plant can still qualify for the white flower of a blameless life, but I must say a little immodesty would please me better. It's just the same with that fine tree we have in the courtyard; he will die childless because he belongs to a kind that's very rare in these latitudes. In his case, it's the wind that's responsible for consummating the marriage, but the wall is a trifle high." "By Jove, yes," said M. de Bréauté, "you ought to take just a couple of inches off the top, that will be quite enough. There are certain operations one ought to know how to perform. The flavour of vanilla we tasted in the excellent ice you gave us this evening, Duchess, comes from a plant called the vanilla tree. This plant produces flowers which are both male and female, but a sort of solid wall set up between them prevents any communication. And so we could never get any fruit from them until a young Negro, a native of Réunion, by the name of Albins, which by the way is rather an odd name for a black man since it means 'white,' had the happy thought of using the point of a needle to bring the separate organs into contact." "Babal, you're divine, you know everything," cried the Duchess. "But you yourself, Oriane, have told me things I had no idea of," the Princesse de Parme assured her. "I must explain to your Highness that it is Swann who has always talked to me all about botany. Sometimes when we were too bored to go to a tea-party or a concert we would set off for the country, and he would shew me extraordinary marriages between flowers, which was far more amusing than going to human marriages—no wedding-breakfast and no crowd in the sacristy. We never had time to go very far. Now that motor-cars have come in, it would be delightful. Unfortunately, in the interval he himself has made an even more astonishing marriage, which makes everything very difficult. Oh, Ma'am, life is a dreadful business, we spend our whole time doing things that bore us, and when by mere chance we come across somebody with whom we could go and look at something really interesting, he has to make a marriage like Swann's. Faced with the alternatives of giving up my botanical expeditions and being obliged to call upon a degrading person, I chose the former calamity. Besides, when it comes to that, there was no need to go quite so far. It seems that here, in my own little bit of garden, more odd things happen in broad daylight than at midnight—in the Bois de Boulogne! Only they attract no attention, because among flowers it's all done quite simply, you see a little orange shower, or else a very dusty fly coming to wipe its feet or take a bath before crawling into a flower. And that does the trick!" "The cabinet the plant is standing on is splendid, too; it's Empire, I think," said the Princess, who, not being familiar with the works of Darwin and his followers, was unable to grasp the point of the Duchess's pleasantries. "It's lovely, isn't it? I'm so glad

Ma'am likes it," replied the Duchess, "it's a magnificent piece. I must tell you that I've always adored the Empire style, even when it wasn't in fashion. I remember at Guermantes I got into terrible disgrace with my mother-in-law because I told them to bring down from the attics all the splendid Empire furniture Basin had inherited from the Montesquious, and used it to furnish the wing we lived in." M. de Guermantes smiled. He must nevertheless have remembered that the course of events had been totally different. But, the witticisms of the Princesse des Laumes at the expense of her mother-in-law's bad taste having been a tradition during the short time in which the Prince was in love with his wife, his love for the latter had been outlasted by a certain contempt for the intellectual inferiority of the former, a contempt which, however, went hand in hand with a considerable attachment and respect. "The Iénas have the same armchair with Wedgwood medallions, it's a lovely thing, but I prefer my own;" said the Duchess, with the same air of impartiality as if she had been the possessor of neither of the articles under discussion. "I know, of course, that they've some marvellous things which I haven't got." The Princesse de Parme remained silent. "But it's quite true; your Highness hasn't seen their collection. Oh, you ought really to come there one day with me, it's one of the most magnificent things in Paris. You'd say it was a museum come to life." And since this suggestion was one of the most 'Guermantes' of the Duchess's audacities, inasmuch as the Iénas were for the Princesse de Parme rank usurpers, their son bearing like her own the title of Duc de Guastalla, Mme. de Guermantes in thus launching it could not refrain (so far did the love that she bore for her own originality prevail over the deference due to the Princesse de Parme) from casting at her other guests a smiling glance of amusement. They too made an effort to smile, at once frightened, bewildered, and above all delighted to think that they were being ear-witnesses of Oriane's very 'latest' and could carry it away with them 'red hot.' They were only half shocked, knowing that the Duchess had the knack of strewing the ground with all the Courvoisier prejudices to achieve a vital success more thrilling and more enjoyable. Had she not, within the last few years, brought together Princesse Mathilde and that Duc d'Aumale who had written to the Princess's own brother the famous letter: "In my family all the men are brave and the women chaste"? And inasmuch as Princes remain princely even at those moments when they appear anxious to forget that they are, the Duc d'Aumale and Princesse Mathilde had enjoyed themselves so greatly at Mme. de Guermantes's that they had thereafter formed a defensive alliance, with that faculty for forgetting the past which Louis XVIII shewed when he took as his Minister Fouché, who had voted the death of his brother. Mme. de Guermantes was now nourishing a similar project of arranging a meeting between Princesse Murat and the Queen of Naples. In the meantime, the Princesse de Parme appeared as embarrassed as might have been the heirs-apparent to the Thrones of the Netherlands and Belgium, styled respectively Prince of Orange and Duke of Brabant, had one offered to present to them M. de Mailly Nesle, Prince d'Orange, and M. de Charlus, Duc de Brabant. But, before anything further could happen, the Duchess, whom Swann and M. de Charlus between them (albeit the latter was resolute in ignoring the Iénas' existence) had with great difficulty succeeded in making admire the Empire style, exclaimed: "Honestly, Ma'am, I can't tell you how beautiful you will think it! I must confess that the Empire style has always had a fascination for me. But at the Iénas' it is really like a hallucination. That sort of—what shall I say—reflux from the Expedition to Egypt, and also the sweep forward into our own times from Antiquity, all those things that invade our houses, the Sphinxes that come to crouch at the feet of the sofas, the serpents coiled round candelabra, a huge Muse who holds out a little torch for you to play at *bouillotte*, or has quietly climbed on to the mantelpiece and is leaning against your clock; and then all the Pompeian lamps, the little boat-shaped beds which look as if they had been found floating on the Nile so that you expect to see Moses climb out of them, the classical chariots galloping along the bed tables. . . ." "They're not very comfortable to sit in, those Empire chairs," the Princess ventured. "No," the Duchess agreed, "but," she at once added, insisting on the point with a smile: "I like being uncomfortable on those mahogany seats covered with ruby velvet or green silk. I like that discomfort of the warrior who understands nothing but the curule chair and in the middle of his principal drawing-room crosses his fasces and piles his laurels. I can assure you that at the Iénas' one doesn't stop to think for a moment of how comfortable one is, when one sees in front of one a great strapping wench of a Victory painted in fresco on the wall. My husband is going to say that I'm a very bad Royalist, but I'm terribly disaffected, as you know, I can assure you that in those people's house one comes to love all the big N's and all the bees. Good gracious, after all for a good many years under our Kings we weren't exactly surfeited with glory, and so these warriors who brought home so many crowns that they stuck them even on the arms of the chairs, I must say I think it's all rather fetching! Your Highness ought really." "Why, my dear, if you think so," said the Princess, "but it seems to me that it won't be easy." "But Ma'am will find that it will all go quite smoothly. They are very good people, and no fools. We took Mme. de Chevreuse there," added the Duchess, knowing the force of this example, "she was enchanted. The son is really very pleasant. I'm going to say something that's not quite proper," she went on, "but he has a bedroom, and more especially a bed in it, in which I should love to sleep—without him! What is even less proper is that I went to see him once when he was ill and lying in it. By his side on the frame of the bed was moulded a long Siren, stretched out at full length, a lovely thing with a mother-of-pearl tail and some sort of lotus flowers in her hand. I assure you," went on Mme. de Guermantes, reducing the speed of her utterances to bring into even bolder relief the words which she had the air of modelling with the pout of her fine lips, drawing them out with her long expressive hands, directing on the Princess as she spoke a gentle, steady and searching gaze, "that with the palms and the golden crown at the side, it was most moving, it was just the arrangement of Gustave Moreau's *Death and the Young Man* (your Highness must know that great work, of course)." The Princesse de Parme, who did not know so much as the painter's name, made violent movements with her head and smiled ardently, in order to manifest her admiration for his picture. But the intensity of her mimicry could not fill the place of that light which is absent from our eyes so long as we do not understand what people are trying to tell us. "A good-looking boy, I believe?" she asked. "No, for he's just like a tapir. The eyes are a little those of a Queen Hortense on a screen. But he has probably come to the conclusion that it is rather absurd for a man to develop such a resemblance, and it is lost in the encaustic surface of his cheeks which give him really rather a Mameluke appearance. You feel that the polisher must call round every morning. Swann," she went on, reverting to the bed of the young Duke, "was struck by the resemblance between this Siren and Gustave Moreau's *Death*. But apart from that," she added, her speech becoming more rapid though still serious, so as to provoke more laughter, "there was nothing really that could *strike* us, for it was only a cold in the head, and the young man made a marvellous recovery." "They say he's a snob?" put in M. de Bréauté, with a malicious twinkle, expecting to be answered with the same precision as though he had said: "They tell me that he has only four fingers on his right hand; is that so?" "G—ood g—racious, n—o," replied Mme. de Guermantes with a smile of benign indulgence. "Perhaps just the least little bit of a snob in appearance, because he's extremely young, but I should be surprised to hear that he was really, for he's intelligent," she added, as though there were to her mind some absolute incompatibility between snobbishness and intelligence. "He has wit, too, I've known him to be quite amusing," she said again, laughing with the air of an epicure and expert, as though the act of declaring that a person could be amusing demanded a certain expression of merriment from the speaker, or as though the Duc de Guastalla's sallies were recurring to her mind as she spoke. "Anyway, as he never goes anywhere, he can't have much field for his snobbishness," she wound up, forgetting that this was hardly encouraging the Princesse de Parme to make overtures. "I cannot help wondering what the Prince de Guermantes, who calls her Mme. Iéna, will say if he hears that I've been to see her." "What!" cried the Duchess with extraordinary vivacity. "Don't you know that it was we who gave up to Gilbert" (she bitterly regretted that surrender now) "a complete card-room done in the Empire style which came to us from Quiou-Quiou, and is an absolute marvel! There was no room for it here, though I think it would look better here than it does with him. It's a thing of sheer beauty, half Etruscan, half Egyptian. . . ." "Egyptian?" queried the Princess, to whom the word Etruscan conveyed little. "Well, really, you know, a little of both. Swann told us that, he explained it all to me, only you know I'm such a dunce. But then, Ma'am, what one has to bear in mind is that the Egypt of the Empire cabinetmakers has nothing to do with the historical Egypt, nor their Roman with the Romans nor their Etruria. . . ." "Indeed," said the Princess. "No, it's like what they used to call a Louis XV costume under the Second Empire, when Anna de Monchy and dear Brigode's mother were girls. Basin was talking to you just now about Beethoven. We heard a thing of his played the other day which was really quite good, though a little stiff, with a Russian theme in it. It's pathetic to think that he believed it to be Russian. In the same way as the Chinese painters believed they were copying Bellini. Besides, even in the same country, whenever anybody begins to look at things in a way that is slightly novel, nine hundred and ninety-nine people out of a thousand are totally incapable of seeing what he puts before them. It takes at least forty years before they can manage to make it out." "Forty years!" the Princess cried in alarm. "Why, yes," went on the Duchess, adding more and more to her words (which were practically my own, for I had just been expressing a similar idea to her), thanks to her way of pronouncing them, the equivalent of what on the printed page is called italics: "it's like a sort of first isolated individual of a species which does not yet exist but is going to multiply in the future, an individual endowed with a kind of *sense* which the human race of his generation does not possess. I can hardly give myself as an instance because I, on the contrary, have always loved any interesting production from the very start, however novel it might be. But really, the other day I was with the Grand Duchess in the Louvre and we happened to pass before Manet's *Olympia.* Nowadays nobody is in the least surprised by it. It looks just like an Ingres! And yet, heaven only knows how many spears I've had to break for that picture, which I don't altogether like but which is unquestionably the work of *somebody.*" "And is the Grand Duchess well?" inquired the Princesse de Parme, to whom the Tsar's aunt was infinitely more familiar than Manet's model. "Yes; we talked about you. After all," she resumed, clinging to her idea, "the fact of the matter is, as my brother-in-law Palamède always says, that one has between oneself and the rest of the world the barrier of a strange language. Though I admit that there's no one it's quite so true of as Gilbert. If it amuses you to go to the Iénas', you have far too much sense to let your actions be governed by what that poor fellow may think, who is a dear, innocent creature, but really lives in a different world. I feel myself nearer, more akin to my coachman, my horses even, than to a man who keeps on harking back to what people would have thought under Philip the Bold or Louis the Fat. Just fancy, when he goes for a walk in the country, he takes a stick to drive the peasants out of his way, quite in a friendly spirit, saying: 'Get on, clowns!' Really, I'm just as much surprised when he speaks to me as if I heard myself addressed by one of the 'recumbents' on the old gothic tombs. It's all very well that animated gravestone's being my cousin; he frightens me, and the only idea that comes into my head is to let him stay in his Middle Ages. Apart from that, I quite admit that he's never assassinated anyone." "I've just been seeing him at dinner at Mme. de Villeparisis's," said the General, but without either smiling at or endorsing the Duchess's pleasantries. "Was M. de Norpois there?" asked Prince Von, whose mind still ran on the Academy of Moral Sciences. "Why, yes;" said the General. "In fact, he was talking about your Emperor." "It seems, the Emperor William is highly intelligent, but he does not care for Elstir's painting. Not that I'm saying this against him," said the Duchess, "I quite share his point of view. Although Elstir has done a fine portrait of me. You don't know it? It's not in the least like me, but it's a remarkable piece of work. He is interesting while one's sitting to him. He has made me like a little old woman. It's after the style of the *Regents of the Hospital*, by Hals. I expect you know those sublimities, to borrow my nephew's favourite expression," the Duchess turned to myself, gently flapping her fan of black feathers. More than erect on her chair, she flung her head nobly backwards, for, while always a great lady, she was a trifle inclined to play the great lady also. I said that I had been once to Amsterdam and The Hague, but that to avoid confusing my mind, as my time was limited, I had left out Haarlem. "Ah! The Hague! What a gallery!" cried M. de Guermantes. I said to him that he had doubtless admired Vermeer's *Street in Delft*. But the Duke was less erudite than arrogant. Accordingly he contented himself with replying in a tone of sufficiency, as was his habit whenever anyone spoke to him of a picture in a gallery, or in the Salon, which he did not remember having seen. "If it's to be seen, I saw it!" "What? You've been to Holland, and you never visited Haarlem!" cried the Duchess. "Why, even if you had only a quarter of an hour to spend in the place, they're an extraordinary thing to have seen, those Halses. I don't mind saying that a person who only caught a passing glimpse of them from the top of a tramway-car without stopping, supposing they were hung out to view in the street, would open his eyes pretty wide." This utterance shocked me as indicating a misconception of the way in which artistic impressions are formed in our minds, and because it seemed to imply that our eye is in that case simply a recording machine which takes instantaneous photographs.

M. de Guermantes, rejoicing that she should be speaking to me with so competent a knowledge of the subjects that interested me, gazed at the illustrious bearing of his wife, listened to what she was saying about Franz Hals, and thought: "She rides rough-shod over everything! Our young friend can go home and say that he's had before his eyes a great lady of the old school, in the full sense of the word, the like of whom couldn't be found anywhere to-day." Thus I beheld the pair of them, withdrawn from that name Guermantes in which long ago I had imagined them leading an unimaginable life, now just like other men and other women, lingering, only, behind their contemporaries a little way, and that not evenly, as in so many households of the Faubourg, where the wife has had the good taste to stop at the golden, the husband the misfortune to come down to the pinchbeck age of history, she remaining still Louis XV while her partner is pompously Louis-Philippe. That Mme. de Guermantes should be like other women had been for me at first a disappointment; it was now, by a natural reaction and with all these good wines to help, almost a miracle. A Don John of Austria, an Isabella d'Este, situated for us in the world of names, have as little communication with the great pages of history as the Méséglise way had with the Guermantes. Isabella d'Este was no doubt in reality a very minor Princess, similar to those who under Louis XIV obtained no special place at Court. But seeming to us to be of a unique and therefore incomparable essence, we cannot conceive of her as being any less in greatness, so that a supper-party with Louis XIV would appear to us only to be rather interesting, whereas with Isabella d'Este we should find ourselves, were we to meet her, gazing with our own eyes on a supernatural heroine of romance. Well, after we have, in studying Isabella d'Este, in transplanting her patiently from this world of fairyland into that of history, established the fact that her life, her thought contained nothing of that mysterious strangeness which had been suggested to us by her name, once this disappointment is complete we feel a boundless gratitude to this Princess for having had, of Mantegna's paintings, a knowledge almost equal to that, hitherto despised by us and put, as Françoise would have said, lower than the dirt, of M. Lafenestre. After having scaled the inaccessible heights of the name Guermantes, on descending the inner slope of the life of the Duchess, I felt on finding there the names, familiar elsewhere, of Victor Hugo, Franz Hals and, I regret to say, Vibert, the same astonishment that an explorer, after having taken into account, to imagine the singularity of the native customs in some wild valley of Central America or Northern Africa, its geographical remoteness, the strangeness of its flora, feels on discovering, once he has made his way through a hedge of giant aloes or manchineels, inhabitants who (sometimes indeed among the ruins of a Roman theatre and beneath a column dedicated to Venus) are engaged in reading *Mérope* or *Alzire*. And similarly, so remote, so distinct from, so far superior to the educated women of the middle classes whom I had known, the similar culture by which Mme. de Guermantes had made herself, with no ulterior motive, to gratify no ambition, descend to the level of people whom she would never know, had the character—meritorious, almost touching by virtue of being wholly useless—of an erudition in Phoenician antiquities in a politician or a doctor. "I might have shewn you a very fine one," said Mme. de Guermantes, still speaking of Hals, "the finest in existence, some people say, which was left to me by a German cousin. Unfortunately, it turned out to be 'enfeoffed' in the castle—you don't know the expression, nor I either," she added, with her fondness for making jokes (which made her, she thought, seem modern) at the expense of the old customs to which nevertheless she was unconsciously but keenly attached. "I am glad you have seen my Elstirs, but, I must admit, I should have been a great deal more glad if I could have done you the honours of my Hals, this 'enfeoffed' picture." "I know the one," said Prince Von, "it's the Grand Duke of Hesse's Hals." "Quite so; his brother married my sister," said M. de Guermantes, "and his mother and Oriane's were first cousins as well." "But so far as M. Elstir is concerned," the Prince went on, "I shall take the liberty of saying, without having any opinion of his work, which I do not know, that the hatred with which the Emperor pursues him ought not, it seems to me, to be counted against him. The Emperor is a man of marvellous intelligence." "Yes, I've met him at dinner twice, once at my aunt Sagan's and once at my aunt Radziwill's, and I must say I found him quite unusual. I didn't find him at all simple! But there is something amusing about him, something 'forced,' " she detached the word, "like a green carnation, that is to say a thing that surprises me and does not please me enormously, a thing it is surprising that anyone should have been able to create but which I feel would have been just as well uncreated. I trust I'm not shocking you." "The Emperor is a man of astounding intelligence," resumed the Prince, "he is passionately fond of the arts, he has for works of art a taste that is practically infallible, if a thing is good he spots it at once and takes a dislike to it. If he detests anything, there can be no more doubt about it, the thing is excellent." Everyone smiled. "You set my mind at rest," said the Duchess. "I should be inclined to compare the Emperor," went on the Prince, who, not knowing how to pronounce the word archaeologist (that is to say, as though it were spelt 'arkeologist'), never missed an opportunity of using it, "to an old archaeologist" (but the Prince said 'arsheologist') "we have in Berlin. If you put him in front of a genuine Assyrian antique, he weeps. But if it is a modern sham, if it is not really old, he does not weep. And so, when they want to know whether an arsheological piece is really old, they take it to the old arsheologist. If he weeps, they buy the piece for the Museum. If his eyes remain dry, they send it back to the dealer, and prosecute him for fraud. Well, every time I dine at Potsdam, if the Emperor says to me, of a play: 'Prince, you must see that, it's a work of genius,' I make a note not to go to it; and when I hear him fulminating against an exhibition, I rush to see it at the first possible opportunity." "Norpois is in favour of an Anglo-French understanding, isn't he?" said M. de Guermantes. "What use would that be to you?" asked Prince Von, who could not endure the English, in a tone at once of irritation and cunning. "The English are so *schtubid*. I know, of course, that it would not be as soldiers that they would help you. But one can judge them, all the same, by the stupidity of their Generals. A friend of mine was talking the other day to Botha, you know, the Boer leader. He said to my friend: 'It's terrible, an army like that. I rather like the English, as a matter of fact, but just imagine that I, who am only a peasant, have beaten them in every battle. And in the last, when I gave way before a force twenty times the strength of my own, while I myself surrendered, because I had to, I managed to take two thousand prisoners! That was good enough, because I was only commanding an army of farmers, but if those poor fools ever have to stand up against a European army, one trembles to think what may happen to them!' Besides, you have only to see how their King, whom you know as well as I do, passes for a great man in England." I barely listened to these stories, stories of the kind that M. de Norpois used to tell my father; they supplied no food for my favourite train of thought; and besides, even had they possessed the elements which they lacked, they would have had to be of a very exciting quality for my inner life to awaken during those hours in which I dwelt in my skin, my well-brushed hair, my starched shirt-front, in which, that is to say, I could feel nothing of what constituted for me the pleasure of life. "Oh, I don't agree with you at all," said Mme. de Guermantes, who felt that the German Prince was wanting in tact, "I find King Edward charming, so simple, and much cleverer than people think. And the Queen is, even now, the most beautiful thing I've ever seen in the world." "But, Madame la Duchesse," said the Prince, who was losing his temper and did not see that he was giving offence, "you must admit that if the Prince of Wales had been an ordinary person there isn't a club that wouldn't have blackballed him, and nobody would have been willing to shake hands with him. The Queen is charming, exceedingly sweet and limited. But after all there is something shocking about a royal couple who are literally kept by their subjects, who get the big Jewish financiers to foot all the bills they ought to pay themselves, and create them Baronets in return. It's like the Prince of Bulgaria . . ." "He's our cousin," put in the Duchess. "He's a clever fellow." "He's mine, too, but we don't think him a good fellow on that account. No, it is us you ought to make friends with, it's the Emperor's dearest wish, but he insists on its coming from the heart. He says: 'What I want to see is a hand clasped in mine, not waving a hat in the air.' With that, you would be invincible. It would be more practical than the Anglo-French friendship M. de Norpois preaches." "You know him, of course," the Duchess said, turning to me, so as not to leave me out of the conversation. Remembering that M. de Norpois had said that I had once looked as though I wanted to kiss his hand, thinking that he had no doubt repeated this story to Mme. de Guermantes, and in any event could have spoken of me to her only with malice, since in spite of his friendship with my father he had not hesitated to make me appear so ridiculous, I did not do what a man of the world would have done. He would have said that he detested M. de Norpois, and had let him see it; he would have said this so as to give himself the appearance of being the deliberate cause of the Ambassador's slanders, which would then have been no more than lying and calculated reprisals. I said, on the other hand, that, to my great regret, I was afraid that M. de Norpois did not like me. "You are quite mistaken," replied the Duchess, "he likes you very much indeed. You can ask Basin, for if people give me the reputation of only saying nice things, he certainly doesn't. He will tell you that we have never heard Norpois speak about anyone so kindly as he spoke to us of you. And only the other day he was wanting to give you a fine post at the Ministry. As he knew that you were not very strong and couldn't accept it, he had the delicacy not to speak of his kind thought to your father, for whom he has an unbounded admiration." M. de Norpois was quite the last person whom I should have expected to do me any practical service. The truth was that, his being a mocking and indeed somewhat malicious spirit, those people who had let themselves be taken in as I had by his outward appearance of a Saint Louis delivering justice beneath an oak-tree, by the sounds, easily modulated to pity, that emerged from his somewhat too tuneful lips, believed in a deliberate betrayal when they learned of a slander uttered at their expense by a man who had always seemed to put his whole heart into his speech. These slanders were frequent enough with him. But that did not prevent him from feeling attractions, from praising the people he liked and taking pleasure in shewing that he could be of use to them. "Not that I'm in the least surprised at his appreciating you," said Mme. de Guermantes, "he's an intelligent man. And I can quite understand," she added, for the benefit of the rest of the party, making allusion to a purpose of marriage of which I had heard nothing, "that my aunt, who has long ceased to amuse him as an old mistress, may not seem of very much use to him as a young wife. Especially as I understand that even as a mistress she has ceased for years now to serve any practical purpose, she is more wrapped up in her devotions than anything else. Boaz-Norpois can say, in the words of Victor Hugo:

Voilà longtemps que celle avec qui j'ai dormi,
O Seigneur, a quitté ma couche pour la vôtre!

Really, my poor aunt is like the artists of the advanced guard who have stood out all their lives against the Academy, and in the end start a little academy of their own, or the unfrocked priests who get up a little private religion. They should either keep their frocks, or not stick to their profession. And who knows," went on the Duchess with a meditative air, "it may be in preparation for her widowhood, there's nothing sadder than the weeds one's not entitled to wear." "Ah! If Mme. de Villeparisis were to become Mme. de Norpois, I really believe our cousin Gilbert would take to his bed," said General de Monserfeuil. "The Prince de Guermantes is a charming man, but he is, really, very much taken up with questions of birth and manners," said the Princesse de Parme. "I went down to spend a few days with them in the country, when the Princess, unfortunately, was ill in bed. I was accompanied by Petite." (This was a nickname that was given to Mme. d'Hunolstein because she was enormously stout.) "The Prince came to meet me at the foot of the steps, and pretended not to see Petite. We went up to the first floor, to the door into the reception rooms, and then, stepping back to make way for me, he said: 'Oh, how d'ye do, Mme. d'Hunolstein?' (he always calls her that now, since her separation) pretending to have caught sight of Petite for the first time, so as to shew her that he had not come down to receive her at the foot of the steps." "That doesn't surprise me in the least. I don't need to tell you," said the Duke, who regarded himself as extremely modern, more contemptuous than anyone in the world of mere birth, and in fact a Republican, "that I have not many ideas in common with my cousin. Ma'am can imagine that we are just about as much agreed on most subjects as day and night. But I must say that if my aunt were to marry Norpois, for once I should be of Gilbert's opinion. To be the daughter of Florimond de Guise, and then to make a marriage like that would be enough, as the saying is, to make a cat laugh; what more can I say?" These last words, which the Duke uttered as a rule in the middle of a sentence, were here quite superfluous. But he felt a perpetual need to be saying them which made him postpone them to the end of a speech if he had found no place for them elsewhere. They were for him, among other things, almost a question of prosody. "Remember, though," he added, "that the Norpois are gallant gentlemen with a good place, of a good stock."

"Listen to me, Basin, it's really not worth your while to poke fun at Gilbert if you're going to speak the same language as he does," said Mme. de Guermantes, for whom the 'goodness' of a family, no less than that of a wine, consisted in its age. But, less frank than her cousin and more subtle than her husband, she made a point of never in her conversation playing false to the Guermantes spirit, and despised rank in her speech while ready to honour it by her actions. "But aren't you some sort of cousins?" asked General de Monserfeuil. "I seem to remember that Norpois married a La Rochefoucauld." "Not in that way at all, she belonged to the branch of the Ducs de La Rochefoucauld, my grandmother came from the Ducs de Doudeauville. She was own grandmother to Edouard Coco, the wisest man in the family," replied the Duke, whose views of wisdom were somewhat superficial, "and the two branches haven't intermarried since Louis XIV's time; the connexion would be rather distant." "I say, that's interesting; I never knew that," said the General. "However," went on M. de Guermantes, "his mother, I believe, was the sister of the Duc de Montmorency, and had originally been married to a La Tour d'Auvergne. But as those Montmorencys are barely Montmorencys, while those La Tour d'Auvergnes are not La Tour d'Auvergnes at all, I cannot see that it gives him any very great position. He says—and this should be more to the point—that he's descended from Saintrailles, and as we ourselves are in a direct line of descent. . . ."

There was at Combray a Rue de Saintrailles, to which I had never given another thought. It led from the Rue de la Bretonnerie to the Rue de l'Oiseau. And as Saintrailles, the companion of Joan of Arc, had, by marrying a Guermantes, brought into that family the County of Combray, his arms were quartered with those of Guermantes at the foot of one of the windows in Saint-Hilaire. I saw again a vision of dark sandstone steps, while a modulation of sound brought to my ears that name, Guermantes, in the forgotten tone in which I used to hear it long ago, so different from that in which it was used to signify the genial hosts with whom I was dining this evening. If the name, Duchesse de Guermantes, was for me a collective name, it was so not merely in history, by the accumulation of all the women who had successively borne it, but also in the course of my own short life, which had already seen, in this single Duchesse de Guermantes, so many different women superimpose themselves, each one vanishing as soon as the next had acquired sufficient consistency. Words do not change their meaning as much in centuries as names do for us in the space of a few years. Our memory and our heart are not large enough to be able to remain faithful. We have not room enough, in our mental field, to keep the dead there as well as the living. We are obliged to build over what has gone before and is brought to light only by a chance excavation, such as the name Saintrailles had just wrought in my mind. I felt that it would be useless to explain all this, and indeed a little while earlier I had lied by implication in not answering when M. de Guermantes said to me: "You don't know our old wheedler?" Perhaps he was quite well aware that I did know him, and it was only from good breeding that he did not press the question.

Mme. de Guermantes drew me out of my meditation. "Really, I find all that sort of thing too deadly. Listen, it's not always as boring as this at my parties. I hope that you will soon come and dine again as a compensation, with no pedigrees next time," she murmured, incapable both of appreciating the kind of charm which I could find in her house and of having sufficient humility to be content to appeal to me only as a herbarium, filled with plants of another day.

What Mme. de Guermantes believed to be disappointing my expectations was on the contrary what in the end—for the Duke and the General went on to discuss pedigrees now without stopping—saved my evening from becoming a complete disappointment. How could I have felt otherwise until now? Each of my fellow-guests at dinner, smothering the mysterious name under which I had only at a distance known and dreamed of them with a body and with a mind similar or inferior to those of all the people I knew, had given me the impression of flat vulgarity which the view on entering the Danish port of Elsinore would give to any passionate admirer of *Hamlet*. No doubt those geographical regions and that ancient past which put forest glades and gothic belfries into their names had in a certain measure formed their faces, their intellects and their prejudices, but survived in them only as does the cause in the effect, that is to say as a thing possible for the brain to extract but in no way perceptible to the imagination.

And these old-time prejudices restored in a flash to the friends of M. and Mme. de Guermantes their vanished poetry. Assuredly, the motions in the possession of nobles, which make of them the scholars, the etymologists of the language not of words but of names (and this, moreover, relatively only to the ignorant mass of the middle classes, for if at the same level of mediocrity a devout Catholic would be better able to stand questioning upon the details of the Liturgy than a free-thinker, on the other hand an anti-clerical archaeologist can often give points to his parish priest on everything connected even with the latter's own church), those notions, if we are going to confine ourselves to the truth, that is to say to the spirit, had not for these great gentlemen the charm that they would have had for a man of simple birth. They knew perhaps better than myself that the Duchesse de Guise was Princess of Cleves, of Orleans and of Porcien, and all the rest, but they had known, long before they knew all these names, the face of the Duchesse de Guise which thenceforward the names reflected back to them. I had begun with the fairy—were she fated shortly to perish—they with the woman.

In middle-class families one sometimes sees jealousies spring up if the younger sister is married before the elder. So the aristocratic world, Courvoisiers especially but Guermantes also, reduced its ennobled greatness to simple domestic superiorities, by a system of child's-play which I had met originally (and this gave it for me its sole charm) in books. Is it not just as though Tallemant des Réaux were speaking of the Guermantes, and not of the Rohans, when he relates with evident satisfaction how M. de Guéménée cried to his brother: "You can come in here; this is not the Louvre!" and said of the Chevalier de Rohan (because he was a natural son of the Duc de Clermont): "At any rate, he's a Prince." The only thing that distressed me in all this talk was to find that the absurd stories which were being circulated about the charming Hereditary Grand Duke of Luxembourg found as much credence in this drawing-room as they had among Saint-Loup's friends. Plainly it was an epidemic that would not last longer than perhaps a year or two but had meanwhile infected everyone. People repeated the same old stories, or enriched them with others equally untrue. I gathered that the Princesse de Luxembourg herself, while apparently defending her nephew, supplied weapons for the assault. "You are wrong to stand up for him," M. de Guermantes told me, as Saint-Loup had told me before. "Why, without taking into consideration the opinion of our family, who are unanimous about him, you have only to talk to his servants, and they, after all, are the people who know him best. M. de Luxembourg gave his little Negro page to his nephew. The Negro came back in tears: 'Grand Duke beaten me; me no bad boy; Grand Duke naughty man,' it's really too much. And I can speak with some knowledge, he's Oriane's cousin." I cannot, by the way, say how many times in the course of this evening I heard the word 'cousin' used. On the one hand, M. de Guermantes, almost at every name that was mentioned, exclaimed: "But he's Oriane's cousin!" with the sudden joy of a man who, lost in a forest, reads at the ends of a pair of arrows pointing in opposite directions on a metal plate, and followed by quite a low number of kilometres, the words: "Belvédère Casimir-Perier" and "Croix du Grand-Veneur," and gathers from them that he is on the right road. On the other hand the word cousin was employed in a wholly different connexion (which was here the exception to the prevailing rule) by the Turkish Ambassadress, who had come in after dinner. Devoured by social ambition and endowed with a real power of assimilating knowledge, she would pick up with equal facility the story of the Retreat of the Ten Thousand or the details of sexual perversion among birds. It would have been impossible to 'stump' her on any of the most recent German publications, whether they dealt with political economy, mental aberrations, the various forms of onanism, or the philosophy of Epicurus. She was, incidentally, a dangerous person to listen to, for, perpetually in error, she would point out to you as being of the loosest morals women of irreproachable virtue, would put you on your guard against a gentleman whose intentions were perfectly honourable, and would tell you anecdotes of the sort that seem always to have come out of a book, not so much because they are serious as because they are so wildly improbable.

She was at this period little received in society. She had been going for some weeks now to the houses of women of real social brilliance, such as the Duchesse de Guermantes, but as a general rule had confined herself, of necessity, in the noblest families, to obscure scions whom the Guermantes had ceased to know. She hoped to give herself a really fashionable air by quoting the most historic names of the little-known people who were her friends. At once M. de Guermantes, thinking that she was referring to people who frequently dined at his table, quivered with joy at finding himself once more in sight of a landmark and shouted the rallying-cry: "But he's Oriane's cousin! I know him as well as I know my own name. He lives in the Rue Vaneau. His mother was Mlle. d'Uzès." The Ambassadress was obliged to admit that her specimen had been drawn from smaller game. She tried to connect her friends with those of M. de Guermantes by cutting across his track: "I know quite well who' you mean. No, it's not those ones, they're cousins." But this cross-current launched by the unfortunate Ambassadress ran but a little way. For M. de Guermantes, losing interest, answered: "Oh, then I don't know who' you're talking about." The Ambassadress offered no reply, for if she never knew anyone nearer than the 'cousins' of those whom she ought to have known in person, very often these 'cousins' were not even related at all. Then, from the lips of M. de Guermantes, would flow a fresh wave of "But she's Oriane's cousin!" words which seemed to have for the Duke the same practical value as certain epithets, convenient to the Roman poets because they provided them with dactyls or spondees for their hexameters. At least the explosion of: "But she's Oriane's cousin!" appeared to me quite natural when applied to the Princesse de Guermantes, who was indeed very closely related to the Duchess. The Ambassadress did not seem to care for this Princess. She said to me in an undertone: "She is stupid. No, she is not so beautiful as all that. That claim is usurped. Anyhow," she went on, with an air at once reflective, rejecting and decided, "I find her most uncongenial." But often the cousinship extended a great deal further than this, Mme. de Guermantes making it a point of honour to address as 'Aunt' ladies with whom it would have been impossible to find her an ancestress in common without going back at least to Louis XV; just as, whenever the 'hardness' of the times brought it about that a multimillionairess married a prince whose great-great-grandfather had espoused, as had Oriane's also, a daughter of Louvois, one of the chief joys of the fair American was to be able, after a first visit to the Hôtel de Guermantes, where she was, incidentally, more or less coldly received and hotly cross-examined, to say 'Aunt' to Mme. de Guermantes, who allowed her to do so with a maternal smile. But little did it concern me what birth meant for M. de Guermantes and M. de Monserfeuil; in the conversations which they held on the subject I sought only for a poetic pleasure. Without being conscious of it themselves, they procured me this pleasure as might a couple of labourers or sailors speaking of the soil or the tides, realities too little detached from their own lives for them to be capable of enjoying the beauty which personally I proceeded to extract from them.

Sometimes rather than of a race it was of a particular fact, of a date that a name reminded me. Hearing M. de Guermantes recall that M. de Bréauté's mother had been a Choiseul and his grandmother a Lucinge, I fancied I could see beneath the commonplace shirt with its plain pearl studs, bleeding still in two globes of crystal, those august relics, the hearts of Mme. de Praslin and of the Duc de Berri. Others were more voluptuous: the fine and flowing hair of Mme. de Tallien or Mme. de Sabran.

Better informed than his wife as to what their ancestors had been, M. de Guermantes found himself the possessor of memories which gave to his conversation a fine air of an ancient mansion stripped of its real treasures but still full of pictures, authentic, indifferent and majestic, which taken as a whole look remarkably well. The Prince d'Agrigente having asked why Prince Von had said, in speaking of the Duc d'Aumale, 'my uncle,' M. de Guermantes had replied: "Because his mother's brother, the Duke of Württemberg, married a daughter of Louis-Philippe." At once I was lost in contemplation of a casket, such as Carpaccio or Memling used to paint, from its first panel in which the Princess, at the wedding festivities of her brother the Duc d'Orléans, appeared wearing a plain garden dress to indicate her resentment at having seen the return, empty-handed, of the ambassadors who had been sent to sue on her behalf for the hand of the Prince of Syracuse, down to the last, in which she had just given birth to a son, the Duke of Württemberg (the first cousin of the Prince whom I had met at dinner), in that castle called Fantaisie, one of those places which are as aristocratic as certain families. They, moreover, outlasting a single generation of men, see attached to themselves more than one historical personage. In this one, especially, survive side by side memories of the Margravine of Bayreuth, of this other somewhat fantastic Princess (the Duc d'Orléans's sister), to whom it was said that the name of her husband's castle made a distinct appeal, of the King of Bavaria, and finally of Prince Von, to whom it was simply his own postal address, at which he had just asked the Duc de Guermantes to write to him, for he had succeeded to it, and let it only during the Wagner festivals, to the Prince de Polignac, another delightful 'fantasist.' When M. de Guermantes, to explain how he was related to Mme. d'Arpajon, was obliged, going so far and so simply, to climb the chain formed by the joined hands of three or five ancestresses back to Marie-Louise or Colbert, it was still the same thing in each case; a great historical event appeared only in passing, masked, unnatural, reduced, in the name of a property, in the Christian names of a woman, so selected because she was the granddaughter of Louis-Philippe and Marie-Amélie, considered no longer as King and Queen of the French, but merely in the extent to which in their capacity as grandparents they bequeathed a heritage. (We see for other reasons in a gazetteer of the works of Balzac, where the most illustrious personages figure only according to their connexion with the *Comédie Humaine*, Napoleon occupy a space considerably less than that allotted to Rastignac, and occupy that space solely because he once spoke to the young ladies of Cinq-Cygne.) Similarly the aristocracy, in its heavy structure, pierced with rare windows, admitting a scanty daylight, shewing the same incapacity to soar but also the same massive and blind force as the architecture of the romanesque age, embodies all our history, immures it, beetles over it.

Thus the empty spaces of my memory were covered by degrees with names which in taking order, in composing themselves with relation to one another, in linking themselves to one another by an increasingly numerous connexion, resembled those finished works of art in which there is not one touch that is isolated, in which every part in turn receives from the rest a justification which it confers on them.

M. de Luxembourg's name having come up again in the course of the conversation, the Turkish Ambassadress told us how, the young bride's grandfather (he who had made that immense fortune out of flour and cereals) having invited M. de Luxembourg to luncheon, the latter had written to decline, putting on the envelope: "M. So-and-So, Miller," to which the grandfather had replied: "I am all the more disappointed that you were not able to come, my dear friend, because I should have been able to enjoy your society quite intimately, for we were quite an intimate party, just ourselves, and there would have been only the Miller, his Son, and you." This story was not merely utterly distasteful to me, who knew the impossibility of my dear M. de Nassau's writing to the grandfather of his wife (whose fortune, moreover, he was expecting to inherit) and addressing him as 'Miller'; but furthermore its stupidity became glaring from the start, the word 'Miller' having obviously been dragged in only to lead up to the title of La Fontaine's fable. But there is in the Faubourg Saint-Germain a silliness so great, when it is aggravated by malice, that they all decided that the letter had been sent and that the grandfather, as to whom at once everyone confidently declared that he was a remarkable man, had shewn a prettier wit than his grandson-in-law. The Duc de Châtellerault tried to take advantage of this story to tell the one that I had heard in the café: "Everyone had to lie down!"—but scarcely had he begun, or reported M. de Luxembourg's pretension that in his wife's presence M. de Guermantes ought to stand up, when the Duchess stopped him with the protest: "No, he is very absurd, but not as bad as that." I was privately convinced that all these stories at the expense of M. de Luxembourg were equally untrue, and that whenever I found myself face to face with any of the reputed actors or spectators I should hear the same contradiction. I asked myself, nevertheless, whether the contradiction just uttered by Mme. de Guermantes had been inspired by regard for truth or by self-esteem. In either event the latter quality succumbed to malice, for she went on, with a laugh: "Not that I haven't had my little fling at him too, for he invited me to luncheon, wishing to make me know the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, which is how he has the good taste to describe his wife when he's writing to his aunt. I sent a reply expressing my regret, and adding: As for the 'Grand Duchess of Luxembourg' (in inverted commas), tell her that if she is coming to see me I am at home every Thursday after five. I have even had another little fling. Happening to be at Luxembourg, I telephoned, asking him to ring me up. His Highness was going to luncheon, had just risen from luncheon, two hours went by and nothing happened; so then I employed another method: 'Will you tell the Comte de Nassau to come and speak to me?' Cut to the quick, he was at the instrument that very minute." Everyone laughed at the Duchess's story, and at other analogous, that is to say (I am convinced of it) equally untrue stories, for a man more intelligent, better, more refined, in a word more exquisite than this Luxembourg-Nassau I have never met. The sequel will shew that it was I who was in the right. I must admit that, in the midst of her onslaught, Mme. de Guermantes had still a kind word for him. "He was not always like that," she informed us. "Before he went off his head, like the man in the story-book who thinks he's become king, he was no fool, and indeed in the early days of his engagement he used to speak of it in really quite a nice way, as something he could never have dreamed of: 'It's just like a fairy-tale; I shall have to make my entry into Luxembourg in a fairy coach,' he said to his uncle d'Ornessan, who answered—for you know it's not a very big place, Luxembourg: 'A fairy coach! I'm afraid, my dear fellow, you'd never get it in. I should suggest that you take a goat carriage.' Not only did this not annoy Nassau, but he was the first to tell us the story, and to laugh at it." "Ornessan is a witty fellow, and he's every reason to be; his mother was a Montjeu. He's in a very bad way now, poor Ornessan." This name had the magic virtue of interrupting the flow of stale witticisms which otherwise would have gone on for ever. In fact, M. de Guermantes had to explain that M. d'Ornessan's great-grandmother had been the sister of Marie de Castille Montjeu, the wife of Timoléon de Lorraine, and consequently Oriane's aunt, with the result that the conversation drifted back to genealogies, while the idiot of a Turkish Ambassadress breathed in my ear: "You appear to be very much in the Duke's good books; have a care!" and, on my demanding an explanation: "I mean to say, you understand what I mean, he's a man to whom one could safely entrust one's daughter, but not one's son." Now if ever, on the contrary, a man existed who was passionately and exclusively a lover of women, it was certainly the Duc de Guermantes. The state of error, the falsehood fatuously believed to be the truth, were for the Ambassadress like a vital element out of which she could not move. "His brother Mémé, who is, as it happens, for other reasons altogether" (he did not bow to her) "profoundly uncongenial to me, is genuinely distressed by the Duke's morals. So is their aunt Villeparisis. Ah, now, her I adore! There is a saint of a woman for you, the true type of the great ladies of the past. It's not only her actual virtue that's so wonderful but her restraint. She still says 'Monsieur' to the Ambassador Norpois whom she sees every day, and who, by the way, left an excellent impression behind him in Turkey."

I did not even reply to the Ambassadress, in order to listen to the genealogies. They were not all of them important. There came up indeed in the course of the conversation one of those unexpected alliances, which, M. de Guermantes informed me, was a misalliance, but not without charm, for, uniting under the July Monarchy the Duc de Guermantes and the Duc de Fezensac with the two irresistible daughters of an eminent navigator, it gave the two Duchesses the exciting novelty of a grace exotically middle-class, 'Louisphilippically' Indian. Or else, under Louis XIV, a Norpois had married the daughter of the Duc de Mortenart, whose illustrious title struck, in the remoteness of that epoch, the name—which I had found colourless and might have supposed to be modern—of Norpois, carving deeply upon it the beauty of an old medal. And in these cases, moreover, it was not only the less well-known name that benefited by the association; the other, grown commonplace by the fact of its lustre, struck me more forcibly in this novel and more obscure aspect, just as among the portraits painted by a brilliant colourist the most striking is sometimes one that is all in black. The sudden mobility with which all these names seemed to me to have been endowed, as they sprang to take their places by the side of others from which I should have supposed them to be remote, was due not to my ignorance alone; the country-dances which they were performing in my mind they had carried out no less spontaneously at those epochs in which a title, being always attached to a piece of land, used to follow it from one family to another, so much so that, for example, in the fine feudal structure that is the title of Duc de Nemours or Duc de Chevreuse, I was able to discover successively hidden, as in the hospitable abode of a hermit-crab, a Guise, a Prince of Savoy, an Orléans, a Luynes. Sometimes several remained in competition for a single shell: for the Principality of Orange the Royal House of the Netherlands and MM. de Mailly-Nesle, for the Duchy of Brabant the Baron de Charlus and the Royal House of Belgium, various others for the titles of Prince of Naples, Duke of Parma, Duke of Reggio. Sometimes it was the other way; the shell had been so long uninhabited by proprietors long since dead that it had never occurred to me that this or that name of a country house could have been, at an epoch which after all was comparatively recent, the name of a family. And so, when M. de Guermantes replied to a question put to him by M. de Monserfeuil: "No, my cousin was a fanatical Royalist; she was the daughter of the Marquis de Féterne, who played a certain part in the Chouan rising," on seeing this name Féterne, which had been for me, since my stay at Balbec, the name of a country house, become, what I had never dreamed that it could possibly be, a family name, I felt the same astonishment as in reading a fairy-tale, where turrets and a terrace come to life and turn into men and women. In this sense of the words, we may say that history, even mere family history, gives life to the old stones of a house. There have been in Parisian society men who played as considerable a part in it, who were more sought after for their distinction or for their wit, who were equally well born as the Duc de Guermantes or the Duc de La Trémoïlle. They have now fallen into oblivion because, as they left no descendants, their name which we no longer hear sounds like a name unknown; at most, the name of a thing beneath which we never think to discover the name of any person, it survives in some country house, some remote village. The day is not distant when the traveller who, in the heart of Burgundy, stops in the little village of Charlus to look at its church, if he has not sufficient industry or is in too great a hurry to examine its tombstones, will go away ignorant that this name, Charlus, was that of a man who ranked with the highest in the land. This thought reminded me that it was time to go, and that while I was listening to M. de Guermantes talking pedigrees, the hour was approaching at which I had promised to call upon his brother. "Who knows," I continued to muse, "whether one day Guermantes itself may not appear nothing more than a place-name, save to the archaeologists who, stopping by chance at Combray and standing beneath the window of Gilbert the Bad, have the patience to listen to the account given them by Théodore's successor or to read the Curé's guide?" But so long as a great name is not extinct it keeps in the full light of day those men and women who bear it; and there can be no doubt that, to a certain extent, the interest which the illustriousness of these families gave them in my eyes lay in the fact that one can, starting from to-day, follow their ascending course, step by step, to a point far beyond the fourteenth century, recover the diaries and correspondence of all the forebears of M. de Charlus, of the Prince d'Agrigente, of the Princesse de Parme, in a past in which an impenetrable night would cloak the origins of a middle-class family, and in which we make out, in the luminous backward projection of a name, the origin and persistence of certain nervous characteristics, certain vices, the disorders of one or another Guermantes. Almost identical pathologically with their namesakes of the present day, they excite from century to century the startled interest of their correspondents, whether these be anterior to the Princess Palatine and Mme. de Motteville, or subsequent to the Prince de Ligne.

However, my historical curiosity was faint in comparison with my aesthetic pleasure. The names cited had the effect of disincarnating the Duchess's guests, whom, for all they might call themselves Prince d'Agrigente or de Cystira, their mask of flesh and of a common intelligence or want of intelligence had transformed into ordinary mortals, so much so that I had made my landing on the ducal door-mat not as upon the threshold (as I had supposed) but as at the farthest confines of the enchanted world of names. The Prince d'Agrigente himself, as soon as I heard that his mother had been a Damas, a granddaughter of the Duke of Modena, was delivered, as from an unstable chemical alloy, from the face and speech that prevented one from recognising him, and went to form with Damas and Modena, which themselves were only titles, a combination infinitely more seductive. Each name displaced by the attractions of another, with which I had never suspected it of having any affinity, left the unalterable position which it had occupied in my brain, where familiarity had dulled it, and, speeding to join the Mortemarts, the Stuarts or the Bourbons, traced with them branches of the most graceful design and an ever-changing colour. The name Guermantes itself received from all the beautiful names—extinct, and so all the more glowingly rekindled—with which I learned only now that it was connected, a new sense and purpose, purely poetical. At the most, at the extremity of each spray that burgeoned from the exalted stem, I could see it flower in some face of a wise king or illustrious princess, like the sire of Henri IV or the Duchesse de Longueville. But as these faces, different in this respect from those of the party around me, were not discoloured for me by any trace of physical experience or fashionable mediocrity, they remained, in their handsome outlines and rainbow iridescence, homogeneous with those names which at regular intervals, each of a different hue, detached themselves from the genealogical tree of Guermantes, and disturbed with no foreign or opaque matter the buds—pellucid, alternate, many-coloured—which (like, in the old Jesse windows, the ancestors of Jesus) blossomed on either side of the tree of glass.

Already I had made several attempts to slip away, on account, more than for any other reason, of the triviality which my presence at it imparted to the gathering, albeit it was one of those which I had long imagined as being so beautiful—as it would doubtless have been had there been no inconvenient witness present. At least my departure would permit the other guests, once the profane intruder was no longer among them, to constitute themselves at length into a secret conclave. They would be free to celebrate the mysteries for the celebration of which they had met together, for it could obviously not have been to talk of Franz Hals or of avarice, and to talk of them in the same way as people talk in middle-class society. They uttered nothing but trivialities, doubtless because I was in the room, and I felt with some compunction, on seeing all these pretty women kept apart, that I was preventing them by my presence from carrying on, in the most precious of its drawing-rooms, the mysterious life of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. But this departure which I was trying at every moment to effect, M. and Mme. de Guermantes carried the spirit of self-sacrifice so far as to postpone, by keeping me in the room. A more curious thing still, several of the ladies who had come hurrying, delighted, beautifully dressed, with constellations of jewels, to be present at a party which, through my fault only, differed in no essential point from those that are given elsewhere than in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, any more than one feels oneself at Balbec to be in a town that differs from what one's eyes are accustomed to see—several of these ladies retired not at all disappointed, as they had every reason to be, but thanking Mme. de Guermantes most effusively for the delightful evening which they had spent, as though on the other days, those on which I was not present, nothing more used to occur.

Was it really for the sake of dinners such as this that all these people dressed themselves up and refused to allow the penetration of middle-class women into their so exclusive drawing-rooms—for dinners such as this? The same, had I been absent? The suspicion flashed across my mind for a moment, but it was too absurd. Plain commonsense enabled me to brush it aside. And then, if I had adopted it, what would have been left of the name Guermantes, already so degraded since Combray?

It struck me that these flower-maidens were, to a strange extent, either ready to be pleased with another person or anxious to make that person pleased with them, for more than one of them, to whom I had not uttered, during the whole course of the evening, more than two or three casual remarks, the stupidity of which had left me blushing, made a point, before leaving the drawing-room, of coming to tell me, fastening on me her fine caressing eyes, straightening as she spoke the garland of orchids that followed the curve of her bosom, what an intense pleasure it had been to her to make my acquaintance, and to speak to me—a veiled allusion to an invitation to dinner—of her desire to 'arrange something' after she had 'fixed a day' with Mme. de Guermantes. None of these flower ladies left the room before the Princesse de Parme. The presence of that lady—one must never depart before Royalty—was one of the two reasons, neither of which I had guessed, for which the Duchess had insisted so strongly on my remaining. As soon as Mme. de Parme had risen, it was like a deliverance. Each of the ladies having made a genuflexion before the Princess, who raised her up from the ground, they received from her, in a kiss, and like a benediction which they had craved kneeling, the permission to ask for their cloaks and carriages. With the result that there followed, at the front door, a sort of stentorian recital of great names from the History of France. The Princesse de Parme had forbidden Mme. de Guermantes to accompany her downstairs to the hall for fear of her catching cold, and the Duke had added: "There, Oriane, since Ma'am gives you leave, remember what the doctor told you."

"I am sure the Princesse de Parme was *most pleased* to take dinner with you." I knew the formula. The Duke had come the whole way across the drawing-room in order to utter it before me with an obliging, concerned air, as though he were handing me a diploma or offering me a plateful of biscuits. And I guessed from the pleasure which he appeared to be feeling as he spoke, and which brought so sweet an expression momentarily into his face, that the effort which this represented for him was of the kind which he would continue to make to the very end of his life, like one of those honorific and easy posts which, even when paralytic, one is still allowed to retain.

Just as I was about to leave, the lady in waiting reappeared in the drawing-room, having forgotten to take away some wonderful carnations, sent up from Guermantes, which the Duchess had presented to Mme. de Parme. The lady in waiting was somewhat flushed, one felt that she had just been receiving a scolding, for the Princess, so kind to everyone else, could not contain her impatience at the stupidity of her attendant. And so the latter picked up the flowers and ran quickly, but to preserve her air of ease and independence flung at me as she passed: "The Princess says I'm keeping her waiting; she wants to be gone, and to have the carnations as well. Good lord! I'm not a little bird, I can't be in two places at once."

Alas! the rule of not leaving before Royalty was not the only one. I could not depart at once, for there was another: this was that the famous lavishness, unknown to the Courvoisiers, with which the Guermantes, whether opulent or practically ruined, excelled in entertaining their friends, was not only a material lavishness, of the kind that I had often experienced with Robert de Saint-Loup, but also a lavish display of charming words, of courteous actions, a whole system of verbal elegance supplied from a positive treasure-house within. But as this last, in the inactivity of fashionable existence, must remain unemployed, it expanded at times, sought an outlet in a sort of fugitive effusion, all the more intense, which might, in Mme. de Guermantes, have led one to suppose a genuine affection for oneself. Which she did, for that matter, feel at the moment when she let it overflow, for she found then in the society of the friend, man or woman, with whom she happened to be a sort of intoxication, in no way sensual, similar to that which music produces in certain people; she would suddenly detach a flower from her bodice, or a medallion, and present it to someone with whom she would have liked to prolong the evening, with a melancholy feeling the while that such a prolongation could have led to nothing but idle talk, into which nothing could have passed of the nervous pleasure, the fleeting emotion, similar to the first warm days of spring in the impression they leave behind them of exhaustion and regret. As for the friend, it did not do for him to put too implicit a faith in the promises, more exhilarating than anything he had ever heard, tendered by these women who, because they feel with so much more force the sweetness of a moment, make of it, with a delicacy, a nobility of which normally constituted creatures are incapable, a compelling masterpiece of grace and goodness, and have no longer anything of themselves left to give when the next moment has arrived. Their affection does not outlive the exaltation that has dictated it; and the subtlety of mind which had then led them to divine all the things that you wished to hear and to say them to you will permit them just as easily, a few days later, to seize hold of your absurdities and use them to entertain another of their visitors with whom they will then be in the act of enjoying one of those 'musical moments' which are so brief.

In the hall where I asked a footman for my snowboots which I had brought as a precaution against the snow, several flakes of which had already fallen, to be converted rapidly into slush, not having realised that they were hardly fashionable, I felt, at the contemptuous smile on all sides, a shame which rose to its highest pitch when I saw that Mme. de Parme had not gone and was watching me put on my American 'rubbers.' The Princess came towards me. "Oh! What a good idea," she exclaimed, "it's so practical! There's a sensible man for you. Madame, we shall have to get a pair of those," she went on to her lady in waiting, while the mockery of the footmen turned to respect and the other guests crowded round me to inquire where I had managed to find these marvels. "With those on, you will have nothing to fear even if it starts snowing again and you have a long way to go. You're independent of the weather," said the Princess to me. "Oh! If it comes to that, your Royal Highness can be reassured," broke in the lady in waiting with a knowing air, "it will not snow again." "What do you know about it, Madame?" came witheringly from the excellent Princesse de Parme, who alone could succeed in piercing the thick skin of her lady in waiting. "I can assure your Royal Highness, it cannot snow again. It is a physical impossibility." "But why?" "It cannot snow any more, they have taken the necessary steps to prevent it, they have put down salt in the streets!" The simple-minded lady did not observe either the anger of the Princess or the mirth of the rest of her audience, for instead of remaining silent she said to me with a genial smile, paying no heed to my repeated denials of any connexion with Admiral Jurien de la Gravière: "Not that it matters, after all. This gentleman must have stout sea-legs. What's bred in the bone!"

Then, having escorted the Princesse de Parme to her carriage, M. de Guermantes said to me, taking hold of my greatcoat: "Let me help you into your skin." He had ceased even to smile when he employed this expression, for those that were most vulgar had for that very reason, because of the Guermantes affectation of simplicity, become aristocratic.

An exaltation that sank only into melancholy, because it was artificial, was what I also, although quite differently from Mme. de Guermantes, felt once I had finally left her house, in the carriage that was taking me to that of M. de Charlus. We can at pleasure abandon ourselves to one or other of two forces of which one rises in ourselves, emanates from our deepest impressions, the other comes to us from without. The first carries with it naturally a joy, the joy that springs from the life of the creator. The other current, that which endeavours to introduce into us the movement by which persons external to ourselves are stirred, is not accompanied by pleasure; but we can add a pleasure to it, by the shock of reaction, in an intoxication so feigned that it turns swiftly into boredom, into melancholy, whence the gloomy faces of so many men of fashion, and all those nervous conditions which may make them end in suicide. Well, in the carriage which was taking me to M. de Charlus, I was a prey to this second sort of exaltation, widely different from that which is given us by a personal impression, such as I had received in other carriages, once at Combray, in Dr. Percepied's gig, from which I had seen painted against the setting sun the spires of Martinville, another day at Balbec, in Mme. de Villeparisis's barouche, when I strove to identify the reminiscence that was suggested to me by an avenue of trees. But in this third carriage, what I had before my mind's eye were those conversations that had seemed to me so tedious at Mme. de Guermante's dinner-table, for example Prince Von's stories about the German Emperor, General Botha and the British Army. I had slipped them into the frame of the internal stereoscope through the lenses of which, once we are no longer ourselves, once, endowed with the spirit of society, we no longer wish to receive our life save from other people, we cast into relief what they have said and done. Like a tipsy man filled with tender feeling for the waiter who has been serving him, I marvelled at my good fortune, a good fortune not realised by me, it is true, at the actual moment, in having dined with a person who knew William II so well, and had told stories about him that were—upon my word—really witty. And, as I repeated to myself, with the Prince's German accent, the story of General Botha, I laughed out loud, as though this laugh, like certain kinds of applause which increase one's inward admiration, were necessary to the story as a corroboration of its comic element. Through the magnifying lenses even those of Mme. de Guermantes's pronouncements which had struck me as being stupid (as for example that on the Hals pictures which one ought to see from the top of a tramway-car) took on a life, a depth that were extraordinary. And I must say that, even if this exaltation was quick to subside, it was not altogether unreasonable. Just as there may always come a day when we are glad to know the person whom we despise more than anyone in the world because he happens to be connected with a girl with whom we are in love, to whom he can introduce us, and thus offers us both utility and gratification, attributes in each of which we should have supposed him to be entirely lacking, so there is no conversation, any more than there are personal relations, from which we can be certain that we shall not one day derive some benefit. What Mme. de Guermantes had said to me about the pictures which it would be interesting to see, even from a tramway-car, was untrue, but it contained a germ of truth which was of value to me later on.

Similarly the lines of Victor Hugo which I had heard her quote were, it must be admitted, of a period earlier than that in which he became something more than a new man, in which he brought to light, in the order of evolution, a literary species till then unknown, endowed with more complex organs than any then in existence. In these first poems, Victor Hugo is still a thinker, instead of contenting himself, like Nature, with supplying food for thought. His 'thoughts' he at that time expressed in the most direct form, almost in the sense in which the Duke employed the word when, feeling it to be out of date and a nuisance that the guests at his big parties at Guermantes should, in the visitors' book, append to their signatures a philosophico-poetical reflexion, he used to warn novices in an appealing tone: "Your name, my dear fellow, but no 'thoughts' please!" Well, it was these 'thoughts' of Victor Hugo (almost as entirely absent from the

Légende des Siècles as 'airs,' as 'melodies' are from Wagner's later manner) that Mme. de Guermantes admired in the early Hugo. Nor was she altogether wrong. They were touching, and already round about them, without their form's having yet the depth which it was to acquire only in later years, the rolling tide of words and of richly articulated rhymes put them beyond comparison with the lines that one might discover in a Corneille, for example, lines in which a Romanticism that is intermittent, restrained and so all the more moving, nevertheless has not at all penetrated to the physical sources of life, modified the unconscious and generalisable organism in which the idea is latent. And so I had been wrong in confining myself, hitherto, to the later volumes of Hugo. Of the earlier, of course, it was only a fractional part that Mme. de Guermantes used to embellish her conversation. But simply by quoting in this way an isolated line one multiplies its power of attraction tenfold. The lines that had entered or returned to my mind during this dinner magnetised in turn, summoned to themselves with such force the poems in the heart of which they were normally embedded, that my magnetised hands could not hold out for longer than forty-eight hours against the force that drew them towards the volume in which were bound up the *Orientales* and the *Chants du Crépuscule.* I cursed Françoise's footman for having made a present to his native village of my copy of the *Feuilles d'Automne,* and sent him off, with not a moment to be lost, to procure me another. I read these volumes from cover to cover and found peace of mind only when I suddenly came across, awaiting me in the light in which she had bathed them, the lines that I had heard Mme. de Guermantes quote. For all these reasons, conversations with the Duchess resembled the discoveries that we make in the library of a country house, out of date, incomplete, incapable of forming a mind, lacking in almost everything that we value, but offering us now and then some curious scrap of information, for instance the quotation of a fine passage which we did not know and as to which we are glad to remember in after years that we owe our knowledge of it to a stately mansion of the great. We are then, by having found Balzac's preface to the *Chartreuse*, or some unpublished letters of Joubert, tempted to exaggerate the value of the life we led there, the sterile frivolity of which, for this windfall of a single evening, we forget.

From this point of view, if the fashionable world had been unable, at the first moment, to provide what my imagination expected, and must consequently strike me first of all by what it had in common with all the other worlds rather than by its difference, still it revealed itself to me by degrees as something quite distinct. Great noblemen are almost the only people of whom one learns as much as one does of peasants; their conversation is adorned with everything that concerns the land, houses, as people used to live in them long ago, old customs, everything of which the world of money is profoundly ignorant. Even supposing that the aristocrat most moderate in his aspirations has finally overtaken the period in which he lives, his mother, his uncles, his great-aunts keep him in touch, when he recalls his childhood, with the conditions of a life almost unknown today. In the death-chamber of a contemporary corpse Mme. de Guermantes would not have pointed out, but would immediately have perceived, all the lapses from the traditional customs. She was shocked to see at a funeral women mingling with the men, when there was a particular ceremony which ought to be celebrated for the women. As for the pall, the use of which Bloch would doubtless have believed to be confined to coffins, on account of the pall bearers of whom one reads in the reports of funerals, M. de Guermantes could remember the time when, as a child, he had seen it borne at the wedding of M. de Mailly-Nesle. While Saint-Loup had sold his priceless 'Genealogical Tree,' old portraits of the Bouillons, letters of Louis XIII, in order to buy Carrières and furniture in the modern style, M. and Mme. de Guermantes, moved by a sentiment in which the burning love of art may have played only a minor part, and which left them themselves more insignificant than before, had kept their marvellous Boule furniture, which presented a picture attractive in a different way to an artist. A literary man would similarly have been enchanted by their conversation, which would have been for him—for one hungry man has no need of another to keep him company—a living dictionary of all those expressions which every day are becoming more and more forgotten: Saint-Joseph cravats, children dedicated to the Blue, and so forth, which one finds to-day only among those people who have constituted themselves the friendly and benevolent custodians of the past. The pleasure that a writer, more than among other writers, feels among them is not without danger, for there is a risk of his coming to believe that the things of the past have a charm in themselves, of his transferring them bodily into his work, still-born in that case, exhaling a tedium for which he consoles himself with the reflexion: "It is attractive because it's true; that is how people do talk." These aristocratic conversations had moreover the charm, with Mme. de Guermantes, of being couched in excellent French. For this reason they made permissible on the Duchess's part her hilarity at the words 'viaticum,' 'cosmic,' 'pythian,' 'pre-eminent,' which Saint-Loup used to employ—as, similarly, at his Bing furniture.

When all was said, very different in this respect from what I had been able to feel before the hawthorns, or when I tasted a crumb of *madeleine*, the stories that I had heard at Mme. de Guermantes's remained alien to me. Entering for a moment into me, who was only physically possessed by them, one would have said that, being of a social, not an individual nature, they were impatient to escape. I writhed in my seat in the carriage like the priestess of an oracle. I looked forward to another dinner-party at which I might myself become a sort of Prince Von to Mme. de Guermantes, and repeat them. In the meantime they made my lips quiver as I stammered them to myself, and I tried in vain to bring back and concentrate a mind that was carried away by a centrifugal force. And so it was with a feverish impatience not to have to bear the whole weight of them any longer by myself in a carriage where, for that matter, I atoned for the lack of conversation by soliloquising aloud, that I rang the bell at M. de Charlus's door, and it was in long monologues with myself, in which I rehearsed everything that I was going to tell him and gave scarcely a thought to what he might have to say to me, that I spent the whole of the time during which I was kept waiting in a drawing-room into which a footman shewed me and where I was incidentally too much excited to look at what it contained. I felt so urgent a need that M. de Charlus should listen to the stories which I was burning to tell him that I was bitterly disappointed to think that the master of the house was perhaps in bed, and that I might have to go home to sleep off by myself my drunkenness of words. I had just noticed, in fact, that I had been twenty-five minutes—that they had perhaps forgotten about me—in this room of which, despite this long wait, I could at the most have said that it was very big, greenish in colour, and contained a large number of portraits. The need to speak prevents one not merely from listening but from seeing things, and in this case the absence of any description of my external surroundings is tantamount to a description of my internal state. I was preparing to leave the room to try to get hold of some one, and if I found no one to make my way back to the hall and have myself let out, when, just as I had risen from my chair and taken a few steps across the mosaic parquet of the floor, a manservant came in, with a troubled expression: "Monsieur le Baron has been engaged all evening, Sir," he told me. "There are still several people waiting to see him. I am doing everything I possibly can to get him to receive you, I have already telephoned up twice to the secretary." "No; please don't bother. I had an appointment with M. le Baron, but it is very late already, and if he is busy this evening I can come back another day." "Oh no, Sir, you must not go away," cried the servant. "M. le Baron might be vexed. I will try again." I was reminded of the things I had heard about M. de Charlus's servants and their devotion to their master. One could not quite say of him as of the Prince de Conti that he sought to give pleasure as much to the valet as to the Minister, but he had shewn such skill in making of the least thing that he asked of them a sort of personal favour that at night, when, his body-servants assembled round him at a respectful distance, after running his eye over them he said: "Coignet, the candlestick!" or "Ducret, the nightshirt!" it was with an envious murmur that the rest used to withdraw, jealous of him who had been singled out by his master's favour. Two of them, indeed, who could not abide one another, used to try to snatch the favour each from his rival by going on the most flimsy pretext with a message to the Baron, if he had gone upstairs earlier than usual, in the hope of being invested for the evening with the charge of candlestick or nightshirt. If he addressed a few words directly to one of them on some subject outside the scope of his duty, still more if in winter, in the garden, knowing that one of his coachmen had caught cold, he said to him, after ten minutes: "Put your cap on!" the others would not speak to the fellow again for a fortnight, in their jealousy of the great distinction that had been conferred on him. I waited ten minutes more, and then, after requesting me not to stay too long as M. le Baron was tired and had had to send away several most important people who had made appointments with him many days before, they admitted me to his presence. This setting with which M. de Charlus surrounded himself seemed to me a great deal less impressive than the simplicity of his brother Guermantes, but already the door stood open, I could see the Baron, in a Chinese dressing-gown, with his throat bare, lying upon a sofa. My eye was caught at the same moment by a tall hat, its nap flashing like a mirror, which had been left on a chair with a cape, as though the Baron had but recently come in. The valet withdrew. I supposed that M. de Charlus would rise to greet me. Without moving a muscle he fixed on me a pair of implacable eyes. I went towards him, I said good evening; he did not hold out his hand, made no reply, did not ask me to take a chair. After a moment's silence I asked him, as one would ask an ill-mannered doctor, whether it was necessary for me to remain standing. I said this without any evil intention, but my words seemed only to intensify the cold fury on M. de Charlus's face. I was not aware, as it happened, that at home, in the country, at the Château de Charlus, he was in the habit, after dinner (so much did he love to play the king) of sprawling in an armchair in the smoking-room, letting his guests remain standing round him. He would ask for a light from one, offer a cigar to another and then, after a few minutes' interval, would say: "But Argencourt, why don't you sit down? Take a chair, my dear fellow," and so forth, having made a point of keeping them standing simply to remind them that it was from himself that permission came to them to be seated. "Put yourself in the Louis XIV seat," he answered me with an imperious air, as though rather to force me to move away farther from himself than to invite me to be seated. I took an armchair which was comparatively near. "Ah! so that is what you call a Louis XIV seat, is it? I can see you have been well educated," he cried in derision. I was so much taken aback that I did not move, either to leave the house, as I ought to have done, or to change my seat, as he wished. "Sir," he next said to me, weighing each of his words, to the more impertinent of which he prefixed a double yoke of consonants, "the interview which I have condescended to grant you at the request of a person who desires to be nameless, will mark the final point in our relations. I shall not conceal from you that I had hoped for better things! I should perhaps be forcing the sense of the words a little, which one ought not to do, even with people who are ignorant of their value, simply out of the respect due to oneself, were I to tell you that I had felt a certain *attraction* towards you. I think, however, that *benevolence,* in its most actively protecting sense, would exceed neither what I felt nor what I was proposing to display. I had, immediately on my return to Paris, given you to understand, while you were still at Balbec, that you could count upon me." I who remembered with what a torrent of abuse M. de Charlus had parted from me at Balbec made an instinctive gesture of contradiction. "What!" he cried with fury, and indeed his face, convulsed and white, differed as much from his ordinary face as does the sea when on a morning of storm one finds instead of its customary smiling surface a thousand serpents writhing in spray and foam, "do you mean to pretend that you did not receive my message—almost a declaration—that you were to remember me? What was there in the way of decoration round the cover of the book that I sent you?" "Some very pretty twined garlands with tooled ornaments," I told him. "Ah!" he replied, with an air of scorn, "these young Frenchmen know little of the treasures of our land. What would be said of a young Berliner who had never heard of the *Walküre*? Besides, you must have eyes to see and see not, since you yourself told me that you had stood for two hours in front of that particular treasure. I can see that you know no more about flowers than you do about styles; don't protest that you know about styles," he cried in a shrill scream of rage, "you can't even tell me what you are sitting on. You offer your hindquarters a Directory *chauffeuse* as a Louis XIV *bergère*. One of these days you'll be mistaking Mme. de Villeparisis's knees for the seat of the rear, and a fine mess you'll make of things then. It's precisely the same; you didn't even recognise on the binding of Bergotte's book the lintel of myosotis over the door of Balbec church. Could there be any clearer way of saying to you: 'Forget me not!'?"

I looked at M. de Charlus. Undoubtedly his magnificent head, though repellent, yet far surpassed that of any of his relatives; you would have called him an Apollo grown old; but an olive-hued, bilious juice seemed ready to start from the corners of his evil mouth; as for intellect, one could not deny that his, over a vast compass, had taken in many things which must always remain unknown to his brother Guermantes. But whatever the fine words with which he coloured all his hatreds, one felt that, even if there was now an offended pride, now a disappointment in love, or a rancour, or sadism, a love of teasing, a fixed obsession, this man was capable of doing murder, and of proving by force of logic that he had been right in doing it and was still superior by a hundred cubits in moral stature to his brother, his sister-in-law, or any of the rest. "Just as, in Velazquez's *Lances*," he went on, "the victor advances towards him who is the humbler in rank, as is the duty of every noble nature, since I was everything and you were nothing, it was I who took the first steps towards you. You have made an idiotic reply to what it is not for me to describe as an act of greatness. But I have not allowed myself to be discouraged. Our religion inculcates patience. The patience I have shewn towards you will be counted, I hope, to my credit, and also my having only smiled at what might be denounced as impertinence, were it within your power to offer any impertinence to me who surpass you in stature by so many cubits; but after all, Sir, all this is now neither here nor there. I have subjected you to the test which the one eminent man of our world has ingeniously named the test of excessive friendliness, and which he rightly declares to be the most terrible of all, the only one that can separate the good grain from the tares. I could scarcely reproach you for having undergone it without success, for those who emerge from it triumphant are very few. But at least, and this is the conclusion which I am entitled to draw from the last words that we shall exchange on this earth, at least I intend to hear nothing more of your calumnious fabrications." So far, I had never dreamed that M. de Charlus's rage could have been caused by an unflattering remark which had been repeated to him; I searched my memory; I had not spoken about him to anyone. Some evil-doer had invented the whole thing. I protested to M. de Charlus that I had said absolutely nothing about him. "I don't think I can have annoyed you by saying to Mme. de Guermantes that I was a friend of yours." He gave a disdainful smile, made his voice climb to the supreme pitch of its highest register, and there, without strain, attacking the shrillest and most insolent note: "Oh! Sir," he said, returning by the most gradual stages to a natural intonation, and seeming to revel as he went in the oddities of this descending scale, "I think that you are doing yourself an injustice when you accuse yourself of having said that we were *friends*. I do not look for any great verbal accuracy in anyone who could readily mistake a piece of Chippendale for a rococo *chaire*, but really I do not believe," he went on, with vocal caresses that grew more and more winning and brought to hover over his lips what was actually a charming smile, "I do not believe that you can ever have said, or thought, that we were *friends*! As for your having boasted that you had been *presented* to me, had *talked* to me, *knew* me slightly, had obtained, almost without solicitation, the prospect of coming one day under my *protection*, I find it on the contrary very natural and intelligent of you to have done so. The extreme difference in age that there is between us enables me to recognise without absurdity that that *presentation*, those *talks*, that vague prospect of future *relations* were for you, it is not for me to say an honour, but still, when all is said and done, an advantage as to which I consider that your folly lay not in divulging it but in not having had the sense to keep it. I will go so far as to say," he went on, passing abruptly for a moment from his arrogant wrath to a gentleness so tinged with melancholy that I expected him to burst into tears, "that when you left unanswered the proposal I made to you here in Paris it seemed to me so unheard-of an act on your part, coming from you who had struck me as well brought up and of a good *bourgeois* family," (on this adjective alone his voice sounded a little whistle of impertinence) "that I was foolish enough to imagine all the excuses that never really happen, letters miscarrying, addresses copied down wrong. I can see that on my part it was great foolishness, but Saint Bonaventure preferred to believe that an ox could fly rather than that his brother was capable of lying. Anyhow, that is all finished now, the idea did not attract you, there is no more to be said. It seems to me only that you might have brought yourself," (and there was a genuine sound of weeping in his voice) "were it only out of consideration for my age, to write to me. I had conceived and planned for you certain infinitely seductive things, which I had taken good care not to tell you. You have preferred to refuse without knowing what they were; that is your affair. But, as I tell you, one can always *write*. In your place, and indeed in my own, I should have done so. I like my place, for that reason, better than yours—I say 'for that reason' because I believe that we are all equal, and I have more fellow-feeling for an intelligent labourer than for many of our dukes. But I can say that I prefer my place to yours, because what you have done, in the whole course of my life, which is beginning now to be a pretty long one, I am conscious that I have never done." His head was turned away from the light, and I could not see if his eyes were dropping tears as I might have supposed from his voice. "I told you that I had taken a hundred steps towards you; the only effect of that has been to make you retire two hundred from me. Now it is for me to withdraw, and we shall know one another no longer. I shall retain not your name but your story, so that at moments when I might be tempted to believe that men have good hearts, good manners, or simply the intelligence not to allow an unparalleled opportunity to escape them, I may remember that that is ranking them too highly. No, that you should have said that you knew me, when it was true

—for henceforward it ceases to be true—I regard that as only natural, and I take it as an act of homage, that is to say something pleasant. Unfortunately, elsewhere and in other circumstances, you have uttered remarks of a very different nature." "Sir, I swear to you that I have said nothing that could insult you." "And who says that I am insulted?" he cried with fury, flinging himself into an erect posture on the seat on which hitherto he had been reclining motionless, while, as the pale frothing serpents stiffened in his face, his voice became alternately shrill and grave, like the deafening onrush of a storm. (The force with which he habitually spoke, which used to make strangers turn round in the street, was multiplied an hundredfold, as is a musical *forte* if, instead of being played on the piano, it is played by an orchestra, and changed into a *fortissimo* as well. M. de Charlus roared.) "Do you suppose that it is within your power to insult me? You evidently are not aware to whom you are speaking? Do you imagine that the envenomed spittle of five hundred little gentlemen of your type, heaped one upon another, would succeed in slobbering so much as the tips of my august toes?" A moment before this my desire to persuade M. de Charlus that I had never said, nor heard anyone else say any evil of him had given place to a mad rage, caused by the words which were dictated to him solely, to my mind, by his colossal pride. Perhaps they were indeed the effect, in part at any rate, of this pride. Almost all the rest sprang from a feeling of which I was then still ignorant, and for which I could not therefore be blamed for not making due allowance. I could at least, failing this unknown element, have mingled with his pride, had I remembered the words of Mme. de Guermantes, a trace of madness. But at that moment the idea of madness never even entered my head. There was in him, according to me, only pride, in me there was only fury. This fury (at the moment when M. de Charlus ceased to shout, in order to refer to his august toes, with a majesty that was accompanied by a grimace, a nausea of disgust at his obscure blasphemers), this fury could contain itself no longer. With an impulsive movement, I wanted to strike something, and, a lingering trace of discernment making me respect the person of a man so much older than myself, and even, in view of their dignity as works of art, the pieces of German porcelain that were grouped around him, I flung myself upon the Baron's new silk hat, dashed it to the ground, trampled upon it, began blindly pulling it to pieces, wrenched off the brim, tore the crown in two, without heeding the vociferations of M. de Charlus, which continued to sound, and, crossing the room to leave it, opened the door. One on either side of it, to my intense stupefaction, stood two footmen, who moved slowly away, so as to appear only to have been casually passing in the course of their duty. (I afterwards learned their names; one was called Burnier, the other Charmel.) I was not taken in for a moment by this explanation which their leisurely gait seemed to offer me. It was highly improbable; three others appeared to me to be less so; one that the Baron sometimes entertained guests against whom, as he might happen to need assistance (but why?), he deemed it necessary to keep reinforcements posted close at hand. The second was that, drawn by curiosity, they had stopped to listen at the keyhole, not thinking that I should come out so quickly. The third, that, the whole of the scene which M. de Charlus had made with me having been prepared and acted, he had himself told them to listen, from a love of the spectacular combined, perhaps, with a '*nunc crudimini*' from which each would derive a suitable profit.

My anger had not calmed that of M. de Charlus, my departure from the room seemed to cause him acute distress; he called me back, made his servants call me back, and finally, forgetting that a moment earlier, when he spoke of his 'august toes,' he had thought to make me a witness of his own deification, came running after me at full speed, overtook me in the hall, and stood barring the door. "There, now," he said, "don't be childish; come back for a minute; he who loveth well chasteneth well, and if I have chastened you well it is because I love you well." My anger had subsided; I let the word 'chasten' pass, and followed the Baron, who, summoning a footman, ordered him without a trace of self-consciousness to clear away the remains of the shattered hat, which was replaced by another. "If you will tell me, Sir, who it is that has treacherously maligned me," I said to M. de Charlus, "I will stay here to learn his name and to confute the impostor." "Who? Do you not know? Do you retain no memory of the things you say? Do you think that the people who do me the service of informing me of those things do not begin by demanding secrecy? And do you imagine that I am going to betray a person to whom I have given my promise?" "Sir, is it impossible then for you to tell me?" I asked, racking my brains in a final effort to discover (and discovering no one) to whom I could have spoken about M. de Charlus. "You did not hear me say that I had given a promise of secrecy to my informant?" he said in a snapping voice. "I see that with your fondness for abject utterances you combine one for futile persistence. You ought to have at least the intelligence to profit by a final conversation, and so to speak as to say something that does not mean precisely nothing." "Sir," I replied, moving away from him, "you insult me; I am unarmed, because you are several times my age, we are not equally matched; on the other hand, I cannot convince you; I have already sworn to you that I have said nothing." "I am lying, then, am I?" he cried in a terrifying tone, and with a bound forwards that brought him within a yard of myself. "Some one has misinformed you." Then in a gentle, affectionate, melancholy voice, as in those symphonies which are played without any break between the different movements, in which a graceful *scherzo*, amiable and idyllic, follows the thunder-peals of the opening pages: "It is quite possible," he told me. "Generally speaking, a remark repeated at second hand is rarely true. It is your fault if, not having profited by the opportunities of seeing me which I had held out to you, you have not furnished me, by that open speech of daily intercourse which creates confidence, with the unique and sovereign remedy against a spoken word which made you out a traitor. Either way, true or false, the remark has done its work. I can never again rid myself of the impression it made on me. I cannot even say that he who chasteneth well loveth well, for I have chastened you well enough but I no longer love you." While saying this he had forced me to sit down and had rung the bell. A different footman appeared. "Bring something to drink and order the brougham." I said that

I was not thirsty and besides had a carriage waiting. "They have probably paid him and sent him away," he told me, "you needn't worry about that. I am ordering a carriage to take you home. . . . If you're anxious about the time . . . I could have given you a room here. . . ." I said that my mother would be uneasy. "Ah! Of course, yes. Well, true or false, the remark has done its work. My affection, a trifle premature, had flowered too soon, and, like those apple trees of which you spoke so poetically at Balbec, it has been unable to withstand the first frost." If M. de Charlus's affection for me had not been destroyed, he could hardly have acted differently, since, while assuring me that we were no longer acquainted, he made me sit down, drink, asked me to stay the night, and was going now to send me home. He had indeed an air of dreading the moment at which he must part from me and find himself alone, that sort of slightly anxious fear which his sister-in-law and cousin Guermantes had appeared to me to be feeling when she had tried to force me to stay a little longer, with something of the same momentary fondness for myself, of the same effort to prolong the passing minute. "Unfortunately," he went on, "I have not the power to make blossom again what has once been destroyed. My affection for you is quite dead. Nothing can revive it. I believe that it is not unworthy of me to confess that I regret it. I always feel myself to be a little like Victor Hugo's Boaz: 'I am widowed and alone, and the darkness gathers o'er me.' "

I passed again with him through the big green drawing-room. I told him, speaking quite at random, how beautiful I thought it. "Ain't it?" he replied. "It's a good thing to be fond of something. The woodwork is Bagard. What is rather charming, d'you see, is that it was made to match the Beauvais chairs and the consoles. You observe, it repeats the same decorative design. There used to be only two places where you could see this, the Louvre and M. d'Hinnisdal's house. But naturally, as soon as I had decided to come and live in this street, there cropped up an old family house of the Chimays which nobody had ever seen before because it came here expressly for *me*. On the whole, it's good. It might perhaps be better, but after all it's not bad. Some pretty things, ain't there? These are portraits of my uncles, the King of Poland and the King of England, by Mignard. But why am I telling you all this? You must know it as well as I do, you were waiting in this room. No? Ah, then they must have put you in the blue drawing-room," he said with an air that might have been either impertinence, on the score of my want of interest, or personal superiority, in not having taken the trouble to ask where I had been kept waiting. "Look now, in this cabinet I have all the hats worn by Mlle. Elisabeth, by the Princesse de Lamballe, and by the Queen. They don't interest you, one would think you couldn't see. Perhaps you are suffering from an affection of the optic nerve. If you like this kind of beauty better, here is a rainbow by Turner beginning to shine out between these two Rembrandts, as a sign of our reconciliation. You hear: Beethoven has come to join him." And indeed one could hear the first chords of the third part of the Pastoral Symphony, 'Joy after the Storm,' performed somewhere not far away, on the first landing no doubt, by a band of musicians. I innocently inquired how they happened to be playing that, and who the musicians were. "Ah, well, one doesn't know. One never does know. They are unseen music. Pretty, ain't it?" he said to me in a slightly impertinent tone, which, nevertheless, suggested somehow the influence and accent of Swann. "But you care about as much for it as a fish does for little apples. You want to go home, regardless of any want of respect for Beethoven or for me. You are uttering your own judgment and condemnation," he added, with an affectionate and mournful air, when the moment had come for me to go. "You will excuse my not accompanying you home, as good manners ordain that I should," he said to me. "Since I have decided not to see you again, spending five minutes more in your company would make very little difference to me. But I am tired, and I have a great deal to do." And then, seeing that it was a fine night: "Very well, yes, I will come in the carriage, there is a superb moon which I shall go on to admire from the Bois after I have taken you home. What, you don't know how to shave; even on a night when you've been dining out, you have still a few hairs here," he said, taking my chin between two fingers, so to speak magnetised, which after a moment's resistance ran up to my ears, like the fingers of a barber. "Ah! It would be pleasant to look at the 'blue light of the moon' in the Bois with some one like yourself," he said to me with a sudden and almost involuntary gentleness, then, in a sadder tone: "For you are nice, all the same; you could be nicer than anyone," he went on, laying his hand in a fatherly way on my shoulder. "Originally, I must say that I found you quite insignificant." I ought to have reflected that he must find me so still. I had only to recall the rage with which he had spoken to me, barely half an hour before. In spite of this I had the impression that he was, for the moment, sincere, that his kindness of heart was prevailing over what I regarded as an almost delirious condition of susceptibility and pride. The carriage was waiting beside us, and still he prolonged the conversation. "Come along," he said abruptly, "jump in, in five minutes we shall be at your door. And I shall bid you a good night which will cut short our relations, and for all time. It is better, since we must part for ever, that we should do so, as in music, on a perfect chord." Despite these solemn affirmations that we should never see one another again, I could have sworn that M. de Charlus, annoyed at having forgotten himself earlier in the evening and afraid of having hurt my feelings, would not have been displeased to see me once again. Nor was I mistaken, for, a moment later: "There, now," he said, "if I hadn't forgotten the most important thing of all. In memory of your grandmother, I have had bound for you a curious edition of Mme. de Sévigné. That is what is going to prevent this from being our last meeting. One must console oneself with the reflexion that complicated affairs are rarely settled in a day. Just look how long they took over the Congress of Vienna." "But I could call for it without disturbing you," I said obligingly. "Will you hold your tongue, you little fool," he replied with anger, "and not give yourself a grotesque appearance of regarding as a small matter the honour of being probably (I do not say certainly, for it will perhaps be one of my servants who hands you the volumes) received by me." Then, regaining possession of himself: "I do not wish to part from you on these words. No dissonance, before the eternal silence of the dominant." It was for his own nerves that he seemed to dread an immediate return home after harsh words of dissension. "You would not care to come to the Bois?" he addressed me in a tone not so much interrogative as affirmative, and that not, as it seemed to me, because he did not wish to make me the offer but because he was afraid that his self-esteem might meet with a refusal. "Oh, very well," he went on, still postponing our separation, "it is the moment when, as Whistler says, the *bourgeois* go to bed" (perhaps he wished now to capture me by my self-esteem) "and the right time to begin to look at things. But you don't even know who Whistler was!" I changed the conversation and asked him whether the Princesse d'Iéna was an intelligent person. M. de Charlus stopped me, and, adopting the most contemptuous tone that I had yet heard him use, "Oh! There, Sir," he informed me, "you are alluding to an order of nomenclature with which I have no concern. There is perhaps an aristocracy among the Tahitians, but I must confess that I know nothing about it. The name which you have just mentioned, strangely enough, did sound in my ears only a few days ago. Some one asked me whether I would condescend to allow them to present to me the young Duc de Guastalla. The request astonished me, for the Duc de Guastalla has no need to get himself presented to me, for the simple reason that he is my cousin, and has known me all his life; he is the son of the Princesse de Parme, and, as a young kinsman of good upbringing, he never fails to come and pay his respects to me on New Year's Day. But, on making inquiries, I discovered that it was not my relative who was meant but the son of the person in whom you are interested. As there exists no Princess of that title, I supposed that my friend was referring to some poor wanton sleeping under the Pont d'Iéna, who had picturesquely assumed the title of Princesse d'Iéna, just as one talks about the Panther of the Batignolles, or the Steel King. But no, the reference was to a rich person who possesses some remarkable furniture which I had seen and admired at an exhibition, and which has this advantage over the name of its owner that it is genuine. As for this self-styled Duc de Guastalla, he, I supposed, must be my secretary's stockbroker; one can procure so many things with money. But no; it was the Emperor, it appears, who amused himself by conferring on these people a title which simply was not his to give. It was perhaps a sign of power, or of ignorance, or of malice; in any case, I consider, it was an exceedingly scurvy trick to play on these unconscious usurpers. But really, I cannot help you by throwing any light on the matter; my knowledge begins and ends with the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where, among all the Courvoisiers and Gallardons, you will find, if you can manage to secure an introduction, plenty of mangy old cats taken straight out of Balzac who will amuse you. Naturally, all that has nothing to do with the position of the Princesse de Guermantes, but without me and my 'Open, Sesame' her portals are unapproachable." "It is really very lovely, isn't it, Sir, the Princesse de Guermantes's mansion?" "Oh, it's not very lovely. It's the loveliest thing in the world. Next to the Princess herself, of course." "The Princesse de Guermantes is better than the Duchesse de Guermantes?" "Oh! There's no comparison." (It is to be observed that, whenever people in society have the least touch of imagination, they will crown or dethrone, to suit their affections or their quarrels, those whose position appeared most solid and unalterably fixed.)

"The Duchesse de Guermantes" (possibly, in not calling her 'Oriane,' he wished to set a greater distance between her and myself) "is delightful, far superior to anything you can have guessed. But, after all, she is incommensurable with her cousin. The Princess is exactly what the people in the Markets might imagine Princess Metternich to have been, but old Metternich believed she had started Wagner, because she knew Victor Maurel. The Princesse de Guermantes, or rather her mother, knew the man himself. Which is a distinction, not to mention the incredible beauty of the lady. And the Esther gardens alone!" "One can't see them?" "No, you would have to be invited, but they never invite *anyone* unless I intervene." But at once withdrawing, after casting it at me, the bait of this offer, he held out his hand, for we had reached my door. "My part is played, Sir, I will simply add these few words. Another person will perhaps some day offer you his affection, as I have done. Let the present example serve for your instruction. Do not neglect it. Affection is always precious. What one cannot do by oneself in this life, because there are things which one cannot ask, nor do, nor wish, nor learn by oneself, one can do in company, and without needing to be Thirteen, as in Balzac's story, or Four, as in *The Three Musketeers*. Good-bye."

He must have been feeling tired and have abandoned the idea of going to look at the moonlight, for he asked me to tell his coachman to drive home. At once he made a sharp movement as though he had changed his mind. But I had already given the order, and, so as not to lose any more time, went across now to ring the bell, without its entering my head that I had been meaning to tell M. de Charlus, about the German Emperor and General Botha, stories which had been an hour ago such an obsession but which his unexpected and crushing reception had sent flying far out of my mind.

On entering my room I saw on my desk a letter which Françoise's young footman had written to one of his friends and had left lying there. Now that my mother was away, there was no liberty which he had the least hesitation in taking; I was the more to blame of the two for taking that of reading the letter which, without an envelope, lay spread out before me and (which was my sole excuse) seemed to offer itself to my eye.

"Dear Friend and Cousin,

"I hope this finds you in good health, and the same with all the young folk, particularly my young godson Joseph whom I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting but whom I prefer to you all as being my godson, these relics of the heart they have their dust also, upon their blest remains let us not lay our hands. Besides dear friend and cousin who can say that to-morrow you and your dear wife my cousin Marie, will not both of you be cast headlong down into the bottom of the sea, like the sailor clinging to the mast on high, for this life is but a dark valley. Dear friend I must tell you that my principal occupation, which will astonish you I am certain, is now poetry which I love passionately, for one must somehow pass the time away. And so dear friend do not be too surprised if I have not answered your last letter before now, in place of pardon let oblivion come. As you are aware, Madame's mother has passed away amid unspeakable sufferings which fairly exhausted her as she saw as many as three doctors. The day of her interment was a great day for all Monsieur's relations came in crowds as well as several Ministers. It took them more than two hours to get to the cemetery, which will make you all open your eyes pretty wide in your village for they certainly won't do as much for mother Michu. So all my life to come can be but one long sob. I am amusing myself enormously with the motorcycle of which I have recently learned. What would you say, my dear friends, if I arrived suddenly like that at full speed at Les Ecorces. But on that head I shall no more keep silence for I feel that the frenzy of grief sweeps its reason away. I am associating with the Duchesse de Guermantes, people whose very names you have never heard in our ignorant villages. Therefore it is with pleasure that I am going to send the works of Racine, of Victor Hugo, of Pages Choisies de Chenedolle, of Alfred de Musset, for I would cure the land in which I saw the light of ignorance which leads unerringly to crime. I can think of nothing more to say to you and send you like the pelican wearied by a long flight my best regards as well as to your wife my godson and your sister Rose. May it never be said of her: And Rose she lived only as live the roses, as has been said by Victor Hugo, the sonnet of Arvers, Alfred de Musset, all those great geniuses who for that cause have had to die upon the blazing scaffold like Jeanne d'Arc. Hoping for your next letter soon, receive my kisses like those of a brother.

"Périgot (Joseph)."

We are attracted by every form of life which represents to us something unknown and strange, by a last illusion still unshattered. In spite of this, the mysterious utterances by means of which M. de Charlus had led me to imagine the Princesse de Guermantes as an extraordinary creature, different from anyone that I knew, were not sufficient to account for the stupefaction in which I was plunged, speedily followed by the fear that I might be the victim of some bad joke planned by some one who wanted to send me to the door of a house to which I had not been invited, when, about two months after my dinner with the Duchess and while she was at Cannes, having opened an envelope the appearance of which had not led me to suppose that it contained anything out of the common, I read the following words engraved on a card: "The Princesse de Guermantes, *née* Duchesse en Bavière, At Home, the ——th." No doubt to be invited to the Princesse de Guermantes's was perhaps not, from the social point of view, any more difficult than to dine with the Duchess, and my slight knowledge of heraldry had taught me that the title of Prince is not superior to that of Duke. Besides, I told myself that the intelligence of a society woman could not be essentially so heterogeneous to that of her congeners as M. de Charlus made out, nor so heterogeneous to that of any one other woman in society. But my imagination, like Elstir engaged upon rendering some effect of perspective without reference to a knowledge of the laws of nature which he might quite well possess, depicted for me not what I knew but what it saw; what it saw, that is to say what the name shewed it. Now, even before I had met the Duchess, the name Guermantes preceded by the title of Princess, like a note or a colour or quantity, profoundly modified from the surrounding values by the mathematical or aesthetic sign that governs it, had already suggested to me something entirely different. With that title one finds one's thoughts straying instinctively to the memoirs of the days of Louis XIII and Louis XIV, the English Court, the Queen of Scots, the Duchesse d'Aumale; and I imagined the town house of the Princesse de Guermantes as more or less frequented by the Duchesse de Longueville and the great Condé, whose presence there rendered it highly improbable that I should ever make my way into it.

Many of the things that M. de Charlus had told me had driven a vigorous spur into my imagination and, making it forget how much the reality had disappointed me at Mme. de Guermantes's (people's names are in this respect like the names of places), had swung it towards Oriane's cousin. For that matter, M. de Charlus misled me at times as to the imaginary value and variety of people in society only because he was himself at times misled. And this, perhaps, because he did nothing, did not write, did not paint, did not even read anything in a serious and thorough manner. But, superior by several degrees to the people in society, if it was from them and the spectacle they afforded that he drew the material for his conversation, he was not for that reason understood by them. Speaking as an artist, he could at the most reveal the fallacious charm of people in society. But reveal it to artists alone, with relation to whom he might be said to play the part played by the reindeer among the Esquimaux. This precious animal plucks for them from the barren rocks lichens and mosses which they themselves could neither discover nor utilise, but which, once they have been digested by the reindeer, become for the inhabitants of the far North a nourishing form of food.

To which I may add that the pictures which M. de Charlus drew of society were animated with plenty of life by the blend of his ferocious hatreds and his passionate affections. Hatreds directed mainly against the young men, adoration aroused principally by certain women.

If among these the Princesse de Guermantes was placed by M. de Charlus upon the most exalted throne, his mysterious words about the 'unapproachable Aladdin's palace' in which his cousin dwelt were not sufficient to account for my stupefaction. Apart from whatever may be due to the divers subjective points of view, of which I shall have to speak later, in these artificial magnifications, the fact remains that there is a certain objective reality in each of these people, and consequently a difference among them. And how, when it comes to that, could it be otherwise? The humanity with which we consort and which bears so little resemblance to our dreams is, for all that, the same that, in the Memoirs, in the Letters of eminent persons, we have seen described and have felt a desire to know. The old man of complete insignificance whom we met at dinner is the same who wrote that proud letter, which (in a book on the War of 1870) we read with emotion, to Prince Friedrich-Karl. We are bored at a dinner-table because our imagination is absent, and because it is bearing us company we are interested in a book. But the people in question are the same. We should like to have known Mme. de Pompadour, who was so valuable a patron of the arts, and we should have been as much bored in her company as among the modern Egerias, at whose houses we cannot bring ourselves to pay a second call, so uninteresting do we find them. The fact remains, nevertheless, that these differences do exist. People are never exactly similar to one another, their mode of behaviour with regard to ourselves, at, one might say, the same level of friendship, reveals differences which, in the end, offer compensations. When I knew Mme. de Montmorency, she loved to say unpleasant things to me, but if I was in need of a service she would squander, in the hope of obtaining it for me effectively, all the credit at her disposal, without counting the cost. Whereas some other woman, Mme. de Guermantes for example, would never have wished to hurt my feelings, never said anything about me except what might give me pleasure, showered on me all those tokens of friendship which formed the rich manner of living, morally, of the Guermantes, but, had I asked her for the least thing above and beyond that, would not have moved an inch to procure it for me, as in those country houses where one has at one's disposal a motor-car and a special footman, but where it is impossible to obtain a glass of cider, for which no provision has been made in the arrangements for a party. Which was for me the true friend, Mme. de Montmorency, so glad always to annoy me and always so ready to oblige, or Mme. de Guermantes, distressed by the slightest offence that might have been given me and incapable of the slightest effort to be of use to me? The types of the human mind are so varied, so opposite, not only in literature but in society, that Baudelaire and Mérimée are not the only people who have the right to despise one another mutually. These peculiarities continue to form in everyone a system of attitudes, of speech, of actions, so coherent, so despotic, that when we are in the presence of anyone his or her system seems to us superior to the rest. With Mme. de Guermantes, her words, deduced like a theorem from her type of mind, seemed to me the only ones that could possibly be said. And I was, at heart, of her opinion when she told me that Mme. de Montmorency was stupid and kept an open mind towards all the things she did not understand, or when, having heard of some spiteful remark by that lady, she said: "That is what you call a good woman; it is what I call a monster." But this tyranny of the reality which confronts us, this preponderance of the lamplight which turns the dawn—already distant—as pale as the faintest memory, disappeared when I was away from Mme. de Guermantes, and a different lady said to me, putting herself on my level and reckoning the Duchess as placed far below either of us: "Oriane takes no interest, really, in anything or anybody," or even (what in the presence of Mme. de Guermantes it would have seemed impossible to believe, so loudly did she herself proclaim the opposite): "Oriane is a snob." Seeing that no mathematical process would have enabled one to convert Mme. d'Arpajon and Mme. de Montpensier into commensurable quantities, it would have been impossible for me to reply, had anyone asked me which of the two seemed to me superior to the other.

Now, among the peculiar characteristics of the drawing-room of the Princesse de Guermantes. the one most generally quoted was a certain exclusiveness, due in part to the royal birth of the Princess, but especially to the almost fossilised rigidity of the aristocratic prejudices of the Prince, prejudices which, incidentally, the Duke and Duchess had made no scruple about deriding in front of me, and which naturally were to make me regard it as more improbable than ever that I should have been invited to a party by this man who reckoned only in royalties and dukes, and at every dinner-party made a scene because he had not been put in the place to which he would have been entitled under Louis XIV, a place which, thanks to his immense erudition in matters of history and genealogy, he was the only person who knew. For this reason, many of the people in society placed to the credit of the Duke and Duchess the differences which distinguished them from their cousins. "The Duke and Duchess are far more modern, far more intelligent, they don't think of nothing, like the other couple, but how many quarterings one has, their house is three hundred years in advance of their cousins'," were customary remarks, the memory of which made me tremble as I looked at the card of invitation, to which they gave a far greater probability of its having been sent me by some practical joker.

If the Duke and Duchess had not been still at Cannes, I might have tried to find out from them whether the invitation which I had received was genuine. This state of doubt in which I was plunged was not due, as I flattered myself for a time by supposing, to a sentiment which a man of fashion would not have felt and which, consequently, a writer, even if he belonged apart from his writership to the fashionable caste, ought to reproduce in order to be thoroughly 'objective' and to depict each class differently. I happened, in fact, only the other day, in a charming volume of memoirs, to come upon the record of uncertainties analogous to those which the Princesse de Guermantes's card made me undergo. "Georges and I" (or "Hély and I," I have not the book at hand to verify the reference) "were so keen to be asked to Mme. Delessert's that, having received an invitation from her, we thought it prudent, each of us independently, to make certain that we were not the victims of an April fool." Now, the writer is none other than the Comte d'Haussonville (he who married the Duc de Broglie's daughter) and the other young man who 'independently' makes sure that he is not having a practical joke played on him is, according to whether he is called Georges or Hély, one or other of the two inseparable friends of M. d'Haussonville, either M. d'Harcourt or the Prince de Chalais.

The day on which the party was to be given at the Princesse de Guermantes's, I learned that the Duke and Duchess had just returned to Paris. The Princess's ball would not have brought them back, but one of their cousins was seriously ill, and moreover the Duke was greatly taken up with a revel which was to be held the same night, and at which he himself was to appear as Louis XI and his wife as Isabel of Bavaria. And I determined to go and see her that morning. But, having gone out early, they had not yet returned; I watched first of all from a little room, which had seemed to me to be a good look-out post, for the arrival of their carriage. As a matter of fact I had made a singularly bad choice in my observatory from which I could barely make out our courtyard, but I did see into several others, and this, though of no value to me, occupied my mind for a time. It is not only in Venice that one has those outlooks on to several houses at once which have proved so tempting to painters; it is just the same in Paris. Nor do I cite Venice at random. It is of its poorer quarters that certain poor quarters of Paris make one think, in the morning, with their tall, wide chimneys to which the sun imparts the most vivid pinks, the brightest reds; it is a whole garden that flowers above the houses, and flowers in such a variety of tints that one would call it, planted on top of the town, the garden of a tulip-fancier of Delft or Haarlem. And then also, the extreme proximity of the houses, with their windows looking opposite one another on to a common courtyard, makes of each casement the frame in which a cook sits dreamily gazing down at the ground below, in which farther off a girl is having her hair combed by an old woman with the face, barely distinguishable in the shadow, of a witch: thus each courtyard provides for the adjoining house, by suppressing all sound in its interval, by leaving visible a series of silent gestures in a series of rectangular frames, glazed by the closing of the windows, an exhibition of a hundred Dutch paintings hung in rows. Certainly from the Hôtel de Guermantes one did not have the same kind of view, but one had curious views also, especially from the strange trigonometrical point at which I had placed myself and from which one's gaze was arrested by nothing nearer than the distant heights formed by the comparatively vague plots of ground which preceded, on a steep slope, the mansion of the Marquise de Plassac and Mme. de Tresmes, cousins (of the most noble category) of M. de Guermantes, whom I did not know. Between me and this house (which was that of their father, M. de Bréquigny) nothing but blocks of buildings of low elevation, facing in every conceivable direction, which, without blocking the view, increased the distance with their diagonal perspective. The red-tiled turret of the coach-house in which the Marquis de Frécourt kept his carriages did indeed end in a spire that rose rather higher, but was so slender that it concealed nothing, and made one think of those picturesque old buildings in Switzerland which spring up in isolation at the foot of a mountain. All these vague and divergent points on which my eyes rested made more distant apparently than if it had been separated from us by several streets or by a series of foothills the house of Mme. de Plassac, actually quite near but chimerically remote as in an Alpine landscape. When its large paned windows, glittering in the sunlight like flakes of rock crystal, were thrown open so as to air the rooms, one felt, in following from one floor to the next the footmen whom it was impossible to see clearly but who were visibly shaking carpets, the same pleasure as when one sees in a landscape by Turner or Elstir a traveller in a mail-coach, or a guide, at different degrees of altitude on the Saint-Gothard. But from this point of view in which I had ensconced myself I should have been in danger of not seeing M. or Mme. de Guermantes come in, so that when in the afternoon I was free to resume my survey I simply stood on the staircase, from which the opening of the carriage-gate could not escape my notice, and it was on this staircase that I posted myself, albeit there did not appear there, so entrancing with their footmen rendered minute by distance and busily cleaning, the Alpine beauties of the Bréquigny-Tresmes mansion. Now this wait on the staircase was to have for me consequences so considerable, and to reveal to me a picture no longer Turneresque but ethical, of so great importance, that it is preferable to postpone the account of it for a little while by interposing first that of my visit to the Guermantes when I knew that they had come home. It was the Duke alone who received me in the library. As I went in there came out a little man with snow-white hair, a look of poverty, a little black neckcloth such as was worn by the lawyer at Combray and by several of my grandfather's friends, but of a more timid aspect than they, who, making me a series of profound bows, refused absolutely to go downstairs until I had passed him. The Duke shouted after him from the library something which I did not understand, and the other responded with further bows, addressed to the wall, for the Duke could not see him, but endlessly repeated nevertheless, like the purposeless smiles on the faces of people who are talking to one over the telephone; he had a falsetto voice, and saluted me afresh with the humility of a man of business. And he might, for that matter, have been a man of business from Combray, so much was he in the style, provincial, out of date and mild, of the small folk, the modest elders of those parts. "You shall see Oriane in a minute," the Duke told me when I had entered the room. "As Swann is coming in presently and bringing her the proofs of his book on the coinage of the Order of Malta, and, what is worse, an immense photograph he has had taken shewing both sides of each of the coins, Oriane preferred to get dressed early so that she can stay with him until it's time to go out to dinner. We have such a heap of things in the house already that we don't know where to put them all, and I ask myself where on earth we are going to stick this photograph. But I have too good-natured a wife, who is too fond of giving people pleasure. She thought it would be polite to ask Swann to let her see side by side on one sheet the heads of all those Grand Masters of the Order whose medals he has found at Rhodes. I said Malta, didn't I, it is Rhodes, but it's all the same Order of Saint John of Jerusalem. As a matter of fact, she is interested in them only because Swann makes a hobby of it. Our family is very much mixed up in the whole story; even at the present day, my brother, whom you know, is one of the highest dignitaries in the Order of Malta. But I might have told all that to Oriane, she simply wouldn't have listened to me. On the other hand, it was quite enough that Swann's researches into the Templars (it's astonishing the passion that people of one religion have for studying others) should have led him on to the history of the Knights of Rhodes, who succeeded the Templars, for Oriane at once to insist on seeing the heads of these Knights. They were very small fry indeed compared with the Lusignans, Kings of Cyprus, from whom we descend in a direct line. But so far, as Swann hasn't taken them up, Oriane doesn't care to hear anything about the Lusignans." I could not at once explain to the Duke why I had come. What happened was that several relatives or friends, including Mme. de Silistrie and the Duchesse de Montrose, came to pay a call on the Duchess, who was often at home before dinner, and not finding her there stayed for a short while with the Duke. The first of these ladies (the Princesse de Silistrie), simply attired, with a dry but friendly manner, carried a stick in her hand. I was afraid at first that she had injured herself, or was a cripple. She was on the contrary most alert. She spoke regretfully to the Duke of a first cousin of his own—not on the Guermantes side, but more illustrious still, were that possible—whose health, which had been in a grave condition for some time past, had grown suddenly worse. But it was evident that the Duke, while full of pity for his cousin's lot, and repeating "Poor Mama! He's such a good fellow!" had formed a favourable prognosis. The fact was that the dinner at which the Duke was to be present amused him, the big party at the Princesse de Guermantes's did not bore him, but above all he was to go on at one o'clock in the morning with his wife to a great supper and costume ball, with a view to which a costume of Louis XI for himself, and one of Isabel of Bavaria for his wife were waiting in readiness. And the Duke was determined not to be disturbed amid all these gaieties by the sufferings of the worthy Amanien d'Osmond. Two other ladies carrying sticks, Mme. de Plassac and Mme. de Tresmes, both daughters of the Comte de Bréquigny, came in next to pay Basin a visit, and declared that cousin Mama's state left no room now for hope. The Duke shrugged his shoulders, and to change the conversation asked whether they were going that evening to Marie-Gilbert's. They replied that they were not, in view of the state of Amanien who was in his last agony, and indeed they had excused themselves from the dinner to which the Duke was going, the other guests at which they proceeded to enumerate: the brother of King Theodosius, the Infanta Maria Concepcion, and so forth. As the Marquis d'Osmond was less nearly related to them than he was to Basin, their 'defection' appeared to the Duke to be a sort of indirect reproach aimed at his own conduct. And so, albeit they had come down from the heights of the Bréquigny mansion to see the Duchess (or rather to announce to her the alarming character, incompatible for his relatives with attendance at social gatherings, of their cousin's illness) they did not stay long, and, each armed with her alpenstock, Walpurge and Dorothée (such were the names of the two sisters) retraced the craggy path to their citadel. I never thought of asking the Guermantes what was the meaning of these sticks, so common in a certain part of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Possibly, looking upon the whole parish as their domain, and not caring to hire cabs, they were in the habit of taking long walks, for which some old fracture, due to immoderate indulgence in the chase, and to the falls from horseback which are often the fruit of that indulgence, or simply rheumatism caused by the dampness of the left bank and of old country houses made a stick necessary. Perhaps they had not set out upon any such long expedition through the quarter, but, having merely come down into their garden (which lay at no distance from that of the Duchess) to pick the fruit required for stewing, had looked in on their way home to bid good evening to Mme. de Guermantes, though without going so far as to bring a pair of shears or a watering-can into her house. The Duke appeared touched that I should have come to see them so soon after their return to Paris. But his face grew dark when I told him that I had come to ask his wife to find out whether her cousin really had invited me. I had touched upon one of those services which M. and Mme. de Guermantes were not fond of rendering. The Duke explained to me that it was too late, that if the Princess had not sent me an invitation it would make him appear to be asking her for one, that his cousins had refused him one once before, and he had no wish to appear either directly or indirectly to be interfering with their visiting list, be 'meddling'; finally, he could not even be sure that he and his wife, who were dining out that evening, would not come straight home afterwards, that in that case their best excuse for not having gone to the Princess's party would be to conceal from her the fact of their return to Paris, instead of hastening to inform her of it, as they must do if they sent her a note, or spoke to her over the telephone about me, and certainly too late to be of any use, since, in all probability, the Princess's list of guests would be closed by now. "You've not fallen foul of her in any way?" he asked in a suspicious tone, the Guermantes living in a constant fear of not being informed of the latest society quarrels, and so of people's trying to climb back into favour on their shoulders. Finally, as the Duke was in the habit of taking upon himself all decisions that might seem not very good-natured: "Listen, my boy," he said to me suddenly, as though the idea had just come into his head, "I would really rather not mention at all to Oriane that you have been speaking to me about it. You know how kind-hearted she is; besides, she has an enormous regard for you, she would insist on sending to ask her cousin, in spite of anything I might say to the contrary, and if she is tired after dinner, there will be no getting out of it, she will be forced to go to the party. No, decidedly, I shall say nothing to her about it. Anyhow, you will see her yourself in a minute. But not a word about that matter, I beg of you. If you decide to go to the party, I have no need to tell you what a pleasure it will be to us to spend the evening there with you." The motives actuating humanity are too sacred for him before whom they are invoked not to bow to them, whether he believes them to be sincere or not; I did not wish to appear to be weighing in the balance for a moment the relative importance of my invitation and the possible tiredness of Mme. de Guermantes, and I promised not to speak to her of the object of my visit, exactly as though I had been taken in by the little farce which M. de Guermantes had performed for my benefit. I asked him if he thought there was any chance of my seeing Mme. de Stermaria at the Princess's. "Why, no," he replied with the air of an expert; "I know the name you mention, from having seen it in lists of club members, it is not at all the type of person who goes to Gilbert's. You will see nobody there who is not excessively proper and intensely boring, duchesses bearing titles which one thought were extinct years ago and which they have revived for the occasion, all the Ambassadors, heaps of Coburgs, foreign royalties, but you mustn't hope for the ghost of a Stermaria. Gilbert would be taken ill at the mere thought of such a thing.

"Wait now, you're fond of painting, I must shew you a superb picture I bought from my cousin, partly in exchange for the Elstirs, which frankly did not appeal to us. It was sold to me as a Philippe de Champaigne, but

I believe myself that it's by some one even greater. Would you like to know my idea? I believe it to be a Velazquez, and of the best period," said the Duke, looking me boldly in the eyes, whether to learn my impression or in the hope of enhancing it. A footman came in. "Mme. la Duchesse has told me to ask M. le Duc if M. le Duc will be so good as to see M. Swann, as Mme. la Duchesse is not quite ready." "Shew M. Swann in," said the Duke, after looking at his watch and seeing that he had still a few minutes before he need go to dress. "Naturally my wife, who told him to come, is not ready. There's no use saying anything before Swann about Marie-Gilbert's party," said the Duke. "I don't know whether he's been invited. Gilbert likes him immensely, because he believes him to be the natural grandson of the Duc de Berri, but that's a long story. (Otherwise, you can imagine! My cousin, who falls in a fit if he sees a Jew a mile off.) But now, don't you see, the Dreyfus case has made things more serious. Swann ought to have realised that he more than anyone must drop all connexion with those fellows, instead of which he says the most offensive things." The Duke called back the footman to know whether the man who had been sent to inquire at cousin Osmond's had returned. His plan was as follows: as he believed, and rightly, that his cousin was dying, he was anxious to obtain news of him before his death, that is to say before he was obliged to go into mourning. Once covered by the official certainty that Amanien was still alive, he could go without a thought to his dinner, to the Prince's party, to the midnight revel at which he would appear as Louis XI, and had made the most exciting assignation with a new mistress, and would make no more inquiries until the following day, when his pleasures would be at an end. Then one would put on mourning if the cousin had passed away in the night. "No, M. le Duc, he is not back yet." "What in the Name of God! Nothing is ever done in this house till the last minute," cried the Duke, at the thought that Amanien might still be in time to 'croak' for an evening paper, and so make him miss his revel. He sent for the *Temps*, in which there was nothing. I had not seen Swann for a long time, and asked myself at first whether in the old days he used to clip his moustache, or had not his hair brushed up vertically in front, for I found in him something altered; it was simply that he was indeed greatly 'altered' because he was very ill, and illness produces in the face modifications as profound as are created by growing a beard or by changing the line of one's parting. (Swann's illness was the same that had killed his mother, who had been attacked by it at precisely the age which he had now reached. Our existences are in truth, owing to heredity, as full of cabalistic ciphers, of horoscopic castings as if there really were sorcerers in the world. And just as there is a certain duration of life for humanity in general, so there is one for families in particular, that is to say, in any one family, for the members of it who resemble one another.) Swann was dressed with an elegance which, like that of his wife, associated with what he now was what he once had been. Buttoned up in a pearl-grey frockcoat which emphasised the tallness of his figure, slender, his white gloves stitched in black, he carried a grey tall hat of a specially wide shape which Delion had ceased now to make except for him, the Prince de Sagan, the Marquis de Modène, M. Charles Haas and Comte Louis de Turenne. I was surprised at the charming smile and affectionate handclasp with which he replied to my greeting, for I had imagined that after so long an interval he would not recognise me at once; I told him of my astonishment; he received it with a shout of laughter, a trace of indignation and a further grip of my hand, as if it were throwing doubt on the soundness of his brain or the sincerity of his affection to suppose that he did not know me. And yet that was what had happened; he did not identify me, as I learned long afterwards, until several minutes later when he heard my name mentioned. But no change in his face, in his speech, in the things he said to me betrayed the discovery which a chance word from M. de Guermantes had enabled him to make, with such mastery, with such absolute sureness did he play the social game. He brought to it, moreover, that spontaneity in manners and personal initiative, even in his style of dress, which characterised the Guermantes type. Thus it was that the greeting which the old clubman, without recognising me, had given me was not the cold and stiff greeting of the man of the world who was a pure formalist, but a greeting full of a real friendliness, of a true charm, such as the Duchesse de Guermantes, for instance, possessed (carrying it so far as to smile at you first, before you had bowed to her, if she met you in the street), in contrast to the more mechanical greeting customary among the ladies of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. In the same way, again, the hat which, in conformity with a custom that was beginning to disappear, he laid on the floor by his feet, was lined with green leather, a thing not usually done, because, according to him, this kept the hat much cleaner, in reality because it was highly becoming. "Now, Charles, you're a great expert, come and see what I've got to shew you, after which, my boys, I'm going to ask your permission to leave you together for a moment while I go and change my clothes, besides, I expect Oriane won't be long now." And he shewed his 'Velazquez' to Swann. "But it seems to me that I know this," said Swann with the grimace of a sick man for whom the mere act of speaking requires an effort. "Yes," said the Duke, turned serious by the time which the expert took in expressing his admiration. "You have probably seen it at Gilbert's." "Oh, yes, of course, I remember." "What do you suppose it is?" "Oh, well, if it comes from Gilbert's, it is probably one of your *ancestors*," said Swann with a blend of irony and deference towards a form of greatness which he would have felt it impolite and absurd to despise, but to which for reasons of good taste he preferred to make only a playful reference.

"To be sure, it is," said the Duke bluntly. "It's Boson, the I forget how manieth de Guermantes. Not that I care a damn about that. You know I'm not as feudal as my cousin. I've heard the names mentioned of Rigaud, Mignard, Velazquez even!" he went on, fastening on Swann the gaze of an inquisitor and executioner in an attempt at once to read into his mind and to influence his response. "Well," he concluded, for when he was led to provoke artificially an opinion which he desired to hear, he had the faculty, after a few moments, of believing that it had been spontaneously uttered; "come, now, none of your flattery, do you think it's by one of those big masters I've mentioned?" "Nnnnno," said Swann. "But after all, I know nothing about these things, it's not for me to decide who daubed the canvas. But you're a dilettante, a master of the subject, to whom do you attribute it? You're enough of an expert to have some idea. What would you put it down as?" Swann hesitated for a moment before the picture, which obviously he thought atrocious. "A bad joke!" he replied, with a smile at the Duke who could not check an impulsive movement of rage. When this had subsided: "Be good fellows, both of you, wait a moment for Oriane, I must go and put on my swallow-tails and then I'll join you. I shall send word to my good woman that you're both waiting for her." I talked for a minute or two with Swann about the Dreyfus case, and asked him how it was that all the Guermantes were anti-Dreyfusards. "In the first place because at heart all these people are anti-Semites," replied Swann, who, all the same, knew very well from experience that certain of them were not, but, like everyone who supports any cause with ardour, preferred, to explain the fact that other people did not share his opinion, to suppose in them a preconceived reason, a prejudice against which there was nothing to be done, rather than reasons which might permit of discussion. Besides, having come to the premature term of his life, like a weary animal that is goaded on, he cried out against these persecutions and was returning to the spiritual fold of his fathers. "Yes, the Prince de Guermantes," I said, "it is true, I've heard that he was anti-semitic." "Oh, that fellow! I wasn't even thinking about him. He carries it to such a point that when he was in the army and had a frightful toothache he preferred to grin and bear it rather than go to the only dentist in the district, who happened to be a Jew, and later on he allowed a wing of his castle which had caught fire to be burned to the ground, because he would have had to send for extinguishers to the place next door, which belongs to the Rothschilds." "Are you going to be there this evening, by any chance?" "Yes," Swann replied, "although I am far too tired. But he sent me a wire to tell me that he has something to say to me. I feel that I shall be too unwell in the next few days to go there or to see him at home; it would upset me, so I prefer to get it over at once." "But the Duc de Guermantes is not anti-semitic?" "You can see quite well that he is, since he's an anti-Dreyfusard," replied Swann, without noticing the logical fallacy. "That doesn't prevent my being very sorry that I disappointed the man—what am I saying? The Duke, I mean—by not admiring his Mignard or whatever he calls it." "But at any rate," I went on, reverting to the Dreyfus case, "the Duchess, she, now, is intelligent." "Yes, she is charming. To my mind, however, she was even more charming when she was still known as the Princesse des Laumes. Her mind has become somehow more angular, it was all much softer in the juvenile great lady, but after all, young or old, men or women, what can you expect, all these people belong to a different race, one can't have a thousand years of feudalism in one's blood with impunity. Naturally they imagine that it counts for nothing in their opinions." "All the same, Robert de Saint-Loup is a Dreyfusard." "Ah! So much the better, all the more as you know that his mother is extremely 'anti.' I had heard that he was, but I wasn't certain of it. That gives me a great deal of pleasure. It doesn't surprise me, he's highly intelligent. It's a great thing, that is."

Dreyfusism had brought to Swann an extraordinary simplicity of mind and had imparted to his way of looking at things an impulsiveness, an inconsistency more noticeable even than had been the similar effects of his marriage to Odette; this new loss of caste would have been better described as a recasting, and was entirely to his credit, since it made him return to the ways in which his forebears had trodden and from which he had turned aside to mix with the aristocracy. But Swann, just at the very moment when with such lucidity it had been granted to him, thanks to the gifts he had inherited from his race, to perceive a truth that was still hidden from people of fashion, shewed himself nevertheless quite comically blind. He subjected afresh all his admirations and all his contempts to the test of a new criterion, Dreyfusism. That the anti-Dreyfusism of Mme. Bontemps should have made him think her a fool was no more astonishing than that, when he was first married, he should have thought her intelligent. It was not very serious either that the new wave reached also his political judgments and made him lose all memory of having treated as a man with a price, a British spy (this latter was an absurdity of the Guermantes set), Clemenceau, whom he declared now to have always stood up for conscience, to be a man of iron, like Cornély. "No, no, I never told you anything of the sort. You're thinking of some one else." But, sweeping past his political judgments, the wave overthrew in Swann his literary judgments also, and even affected his way of pronouncing them. Barrès had lost all his talent, and even the books of his early days were feeble, one could hardly read them again. "You try, you'll find you can't struggle to the end. What a difference from Clemenceau! Personally, I am not anticlerical, but when you compare them together you must see that Barrès is invertebrate. He's a very great fellow, is old Clemenceau. How he knows the language!" However, the anti-Dreyfusards were in no position to criticise these follies. They explained that one was a Dreyfusard by one's being of Jewish origin. If a practising Catholic like Saniette stood out also for a fresh trial, that was because he was buttonholed by Mme. Verdurin, who behaved like a wild Radical. She was out above all things against the 'frocks.' Saniette was more fool than knave, and had no idea of the harm that the Mistress was doing him. If you pointed out that Brichot was equally a friend of Mme. Verdurin and was a member of the Patrie Française, that was because he was more intelligent. "You see him occasionally?" I asked Swann, referring to Saint-Loup. "No, never. He wrote to me the other day hoping that I would ask the Duc de Mouchy and various other people to vote for him at the Jockey, where for that matter he got through like a letter through the post." "In spite of the Case!" "The question was never raised. However I must tell you that since all this business began I never set foot in the place."

M. de Guermantes returned, and was presently joined by his wife, all ready now for the evening, tall and proud in a gown of red satin the skirt of which was bordered with spangles. She had in her hair a long ostrich feather dyed purple, and over her shoulders a tulle scarf of the same red as her dress. "How nice it is to have one's hat lined with leather," said the Duchess, whom nothing escaped. "However, with you, Charles, everything is always charming, whether it's what you wear or what you say, what you read or what you do." Swann meanwhile, without apparently listening, was considering the Duchess as he would have studied the canvas of a master, and then sought her gaze, making with his lips the grimace which implies: 'The devil!' Mme. de Guermantes rippled with laughter. "So my clothes please you? I'm delighted. But I must say that they don't please me much," she went on with a sulking air. "Good Lord, what a bore it is to have to dress up and go out when one would ever so much rather stay at home!" "What magnificent rubies!" "Ah! my dear Charles, at least one can see that you know what you're talking about, you're not like that brute Monserfeuil who asked me if they were real. I must say that I've never seen anything quite like them. They were a present from the Grand Duchess. They're a little too large for my liking, a little too like claret glasses filled to the brim, but I've put them on because we shall be seeing the Grand Duchess this evening at Marie-Gilbert's," added Mme. de Guermantes, never suspecting that this assertion destroyed the force of those previously made by the Duke. "What's on at the Princess's?" inquired Swann. "Practically nothing," the Duke hastened to reply, the question having made him think that Swann was not invited. "What's that, Basin? When all the highways and hedgerows have been scoured? It will be a deathly crush. What will be pretty, though," she went on, looking wistfully at Swann, "if the storm I can feel in the air now doesn't break, will be those marvellous gardens. You know them, of course. I was there a month ago, at the time when the lilacs were in flower, you can't have any idea how lovely they were. And then the fountain, really, it's Versailles in Paris." "What sort of person is the Princess?" I asked. "Why, you know quite well, you've seen her here, she's as beautiful as the day, also rather an idiot. Very nice, in spite of all her Germanic high-and-mightiness, full of good nature and stupid mistakes." Swann was too subtle not to perceive that the Duchess, in this speech, was trying to shew the 'Guermantes wit,' and at no great cost to herself, for she was only serving up in a less perfect form an old saying of her own. Nevertheless, to prove to the Duchess that he appreciated her intention to be, and as though she had really succeeded in being, funny, he smiled with a slightly forced air, causing me by this particular form of insincerity the same feeling of awkwardness that used to disturb me long ago when I heard my parents discussing with M. Vinteuil the corruption of certain sections of society (when they knew very well that a corruption far greater sat enthroned at Montjouvain), Legrandin colouring his utterances for the benefit of fools, choosing delicate epithets which he knew perfectly well would not be understood by a rich or smart but illiterate public. "Come now, Oriane, what on earth are you saying?" broke in M. de Guermantes. "Marie a fool? Why, she has read everything, she's as musical as a fiddle." "But, my poor little Basin, you're as innocent as a new-born babe. As if one could not be all that, and rather an idiot as well. Idiot is too strong a word; no, she's in the clouds, she's Hesse-Darmstadt, Holy Roman Empire, and wa-wa-wa. Her pronunciation alone makes me tired. But I quite admit that she's a charming loony. Simply the idea of stepping down from her German throne to go and marry, in the most middle-class way, a private citizen. It is true that she chose him! Yes, it's quite true," she went on, turning to me, "you don't know Gilbert. Let me give you an idea of him, he took to his bed once because I had left a card on Mme. Carnot. . . . But, my little Charles," said the Duchess, changing the conversation when she saw that the story of the card left on the Carnots appeared to irritate M. de Guermantes, "you know, you've never sent me that photograph of our Knights of Rhodes, whom I've learned to love through you, and I am so anxious to make their acquaintance." The Duke meanwhile had not taken his eyes from his wife's face. "Oriane, you might at least tell the story properly and not cut out half. I ought to explain," he corrected, addressing Swann, "that the British Ambassadress at that time, who was a very worthy woman, but lived rather in the moon and was in the habit of making up these odd combinations, conceived the distinctly quaint idea of inviting us with the President and his wife. We were—Oriane herself was rather surprised, especially as the Ambassadress knew quite enough of the people we knew not to invite us, of all things, to so ill-assorted a gathering. There was a Minister there who is a swindler, however I pass over all that, we had not been warned in time, were caught in the trap, and, I'm bound to admit, all these people behaved most civilly to us. Only, once was enough. Mme. de Guermantes, who does not often do me the honour of consulting me, felt it incumbent upon her to leave a card in the course of the following week at the Elysée. Gilbert may perhaps have gone rather far in regarding it as a stain upon our name. But it must not be forgotten that, politics apart, M. Carnot, who for that matter filled his post quite adequately, was the grandson of a member of the Revolutionary Tribunal which caused the death of eleven of our people in a single day." "In that case, Basin, why did you go every week to dine at Chantilly? The Duc d'Aumale was just as much the grandson of a member of the Revolutionary Tribunal, with this difference, that Carnot was a brave man and Philippe Egalité a wretched scoundrel." "Excuse my interrupting you to explain that I did send the photograph," said Swann. "I can't understand how it hasn't reached you." "It doesn't altogether surprise me," said the Duchess, "my servants tell me only what they think fit. They probably do not approve of the Order of Saint John." And she rang the bell. "You, know, Oriane, that when I used to go to Chantilly it was without enthusiasm." "Without enthusiasm, but with a nightshirt in a bag, in case the Prince asked you to stay, which for that matter he very rarely did, being a perfect cad like all the Orléans lot. Do you know who else are to be dining at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's?" Mme. de Guermantes asked her husband. "Besides the people you know already, she's asked at the last moment King Theodosius's brother." At these tidings the Duchess's features breathed contentment and her speech boredom. "Oh, good heavens, more princes!" "But that one is well-mannered and intelligent," Swann suggested. "Not altogether, though," replied the Duchess, apparently seeking for words that would give more novelty to the thought expressed.

"Have you ever noticed with princes that the best-mannered among them are not really well-mannered? They must always have an opinion about everything. Then, as they have none of their own, they spend the first half of their lives asking us ours and the other half serving it up to us second-hand. They positively must be able to say that one piece has been well played and the next not so well. When there is no difference. Listen, this little Theodosius junior (I forget his name) asked me what one called an orchestral motif. I replied," said the Duchess, her eyes sparkling while a laugh broke from her beautiful red lips: " 'One calls it an orchestral motif.' I don't think he was any too well pleased, really. Oh, my dear Charles," she went on, "what a bore it can be, dining out. There are evenings when one would sooner die! It is true that dying may be perhaps just as great a bore, because we don't know what it's like." A servant appeared. It was the young lover who used to have trouble with the porter, until the Duchess, in her kindness of heart, brought about an apparent peace between them. "Am I to go up this evening to inquire for M. le Marquis d'Osmond?" he asked. "Most certainly not, nothing before to-morrow morning. In fact I don't want you to remain in the house to-night. The only thing that will happen will be that his footman, who knows you, will come to you with the latest report and send you out after us. Get off, go anywhere you like, have a woman, sleep out, but I don't want to see you here before to-morrow morning." An immense joy overflowed from the footman's face. He would at last be able to spend long hours with his lady-love, whom he had practically ceased to see ever since, after a final scene with the porter, the Duchess had considerately explained to him that it would be better, to avoid further conflicts, if he did not go out at all. He floated, at the thought of having an evening free at last, in a happiness which the Duchess saw and guessed its reason. She felt, so to speak, a tightening of the heart and an itching in all her limbs at the sight of this happiness which an amorous couple were snatching behind her back, concealing themselves from her, which left her irritated and jealous. "No, Basin, let him stay here; I say, he's not to stir out of the house." "But, Oriane, that's absurd, the house is crammed with servants, and you have the costumier's people coming as well at twelve to dress us for this show. There's absolutely nothing for him to do, and he's the only one who's a friend of Mama's footman; I would a thousand times rather get him right away from the house." "Listen, Basin, let me do what I want, I shall have a message for him to take in the evening, as it happens, I can't tell yet at what time. In any case you're not to go out of the house for a single instant, do you hear?" she said to the despairing footman. If there were continual quarrels, and if servants did not stay long with the Duchess, the person to whose charge this guerrilla warfare was to be laid was indeed irremovable, but it was not the porter; no doubt for the rougher tasks, for the martyrdoms that it was more tiring to inflict, for the quarrels which ended in blows, the Duchess entrusted the heavier instruments to him; but even then he played his part without the least suspicion that he had been cast for it. Like the household servants, he admired the Duchess for her kindness of heart; and footmen of little discernment who came back, after leaving her service, to visit Françoise used to say that the Duke's house would have been the finest 'place' in Paris if it had not been for the porter's lodge. The Duchess 'played' the lodge on them, just as at different times clericalism, freemasonry, the Jewish peril have been played on the public. Another footman came into the room. "Why have not they brought up the package that M. Swann sent here? And, by the way (you've heard, Charles, that Mama is seriously ill?), Jules went up to inquire for news of M. le Marquis d'Osmond: has he come back yet?" "He's just come this instant, M. le Duc. They're waiting from one moment to the next for M. le Marquis to pass away." "Ah! He's alive!" exclaimed the Duke with a sigh of relief. "That's all right, that's all right: sold again, Satan! While there's life there's hope," the Duke announced to us with a joyful air. "They've been talking about him as though he were dead and buried. In a week from now he'll be fitter than I am." "It's the Doctors who said that he wouldn't last out the evening. One of them wanted to call again during the night. The head one said it was no use. M. le Marquis would be dead by then; they've only kept him alive by injecting him with camphorated oil." "Hold your tongue, you damned fool," cried the Duke in a paroxysm of rage. "Who the devil asked you to say all that? You haven't understood a word of what they told you." "It wasn't me they told, it was Jules." "Will you hold your tongue!" roared the Duke, and, turning to Swann, "What a blessing he's still alive! He will regain his strength gradually, don't you know. Still alive, after being in such a critical state, that in itself is an excellent sign. One mustn't expect everything at once. It can't be at all unpleasant, a little injection of camphorated oil." He rubbed his hands. "He's alive; what more could anyone want? After going through all that he's gone through, it's a great step forward. Upon my word, I envy him having such a temperament. Ah! these invalids, you know, people do all sorts of little things for them that they don't do for us. Now to-day there was a devil of a cook who sent me up a leg of mutton with *béarnaise* sauce—it was done to a turn, I must admit, but just for that very reason I took so much of it that it's still lying on my stomach. However, that doesn't make people come to inquire for me as they do for dear Amanien. We do too much inquiring. It only tires him. We must let him have room to breathe. They're killing the poor fellow by sending round to him all the time." "Well," said the Duchess to the footman as he was leaving the room, "I gave orders for the envelope containing a photograph which M. Swann sent me to be brought up here." "Madame la Duchesse, it is so large that I didn't know if I could get it through the door. We have left it in the hall. Does Madame la Duchesse wish me to bring it up?" "Oh, in that case, no; they ought to have told me, but if it's so big I shall see it in a moment when I come downstairs." "I forgot to tell Mme. la Duchesse that Mme. la Comtesse Molé left a card this morning for Mme. la Duchesse." "What, this morning?" said the Duchess with an air of disapproval, feeling that so young a woman ought not to take the liberty of leaving cards in the morning. "About ten o'clock, Madame la Duchesse." "Shew me the cards." "In any case, Oriane, when you say that it was a funny idea on Marie's part to marry Gilbert," went on the Duke, reverting to the original topic of conversation, "it is you who have an odd way of writing history. If either of them was a fool, it was Gilbert, for having married of all people a woman so closely related to the King of the Belgians, who has usurped the name of Brabant which belongs to us. To put it briefly, we are of the same blood as the Hesses, and of the elder branch. It is always stupid to talk about oneself," he apologised to me, "but after all, whenever we have been not only at Darmstadt, but even at Cassel and all over Electoral Hesse, the Landgraves have always, all of them, been most courteous in giving us precedence as being of the elder branch." "But really, Basin, you don't mean to tell me that a person who was a Major in every regiment in her country, who had been engaged to the King of Sweden . . ." "Oriane, that is too much; anyone would think that you didn't know that the King of Sweden's grandfather was tilling the soil at Pau when we had been ruling the roost for nine hundred years throughout the whole of Europe." "That doesn't alter the fact that if somebody were to say in the street: 'Hallo, there's the King of Sweden,' everyone would at once rush to see him as far as the Place de la Concorde, and if he said: 'There's M. de Guermantes,' nobody would know who M. de Guermantes was." "What an argument!" "Besides, I never can understand how, once the title of Duke of Brabant has passed to the Belgian Royal Family, you can continue to claim it."

The footman returned with the Comtesse Molé's card, or rather what she had left in place of a card. Alleging that she had none on her, she had taken from her pocket a letter addressed to herself, and keeping the contents had handed in the envelope which bore the inscription: 'La Comtesse Molé.' As the envelope was rather large, following the fashion in notepaper which prevailed that year, this manuscript 'card' was almost twice the size of an ordinary visiting card. "That is what people call Mme. Molé's 'simplicity,'" said the Duchess ironically. "She wants to make us think that she had no cards on her, and to shew her originality. But we know all about that, don't we, my little Charles, we are quite old enough and quite original enough ourselves to see through the tricks of a little lady who has only been going about for four years. She is charming, but she doesn't seem to me, all the same, to be quite 'big' enough to imagine that she can take the world by surprise with so little effort as merely leaving an envelope instead of a card and leaving it at ten o'clock in the morning. Her old mother mouse will shew her that she knows a thing or two about that." Swann could not help smiling at the thought that the Duchess, who was, incidentally, a trifle jealous of Mme. Molé's success, would find it quite in accordance with the 'Guermantes wit' to make some impertinent retort to her visitor. "So far as the title of Duc de Brabant is concerned, I've told you a hundred times, Oriane . . ." the Duke continued, but the Duchess, without listening, cut him short. "But, my little Charles, I'm longing to see your photograph." "Ah! *Extinctor draconis latrator Anubis*," said Swann. "Yes, it was so charming what you said about that when you were comparing the Saint George at Venice. But I don't understand: why Anubis?" "What's the one like who was an ancestor of Babal?" asked M. de Guermantes. "You want to see his bauble?" retorted his wife, dryly, to shew she herself scorned the pun. "I want to see them all," she added. "Listen, Charles, let us wait downstairs till the carriage comes," said the Duke; "you can pay your call on us in the hall, because my wife won't let us have any peace until she's seen your photograph. I am less impatient, I must say," he added with a satisfied air. "I am not easily moved myself, but she would see us all dead rather than miss it." "I am entirely of your opinion, Basin," said the Duchess, "let us go into the hall; we shall at least know why we have come down from your study, while we shall never know how we have come down from the Counts of Brabant." "I've told you a hundred times how the title came into the House of Hesse," said the Duke (while we were going downstairs to look at the photograph, and I thought of those that Swann used to bring me at Combray), "through the marriage of a Brabant in 1241 with the daughter of the last Landgrave of Thuringia and Hesse, so that really it is the title of Prince of Hesse that came to the House of Brabant rather than that of Duke of Brabant to the House of Hesse. You will remember that our battle-cry was that of the Dukes of Brabant: 'Limbourg to her conqueror!' until we exchanged the arms of Brabant for those of Guermantes, in which I think myself that we were wrong, and the example of the Gramonts will not make me change my opinion." "But," replied Mme. de Guermantes, "as it is the King of the Belgians who is the conqueror . . . Besides the Belgian Crown Prince calls himself Duc de Brabant." "But, my dear child, your argument will not hold water for a moment. You know as well as I do that there are titles of pretension which can perfectly well exist even if the territory is occupied by usurpers. For instance, the King of Spain describes himself equally as Duke of Brabant, claiming in virtue of a possession less ancient than ours, but more ancient than that of the King of the Belgians. He calls himself also Duke of Burgundy, King of the Indies Occidental and Oriental, and Duke of Milan. Well, he is no more in possession of Burgundy, the Indies or Brabant than I possess Brabant myself, or the Prince of Hesse either, for that matter. The King of Spain likewise proclaims himself King of Jerusalem, as does the Austrian Emperor, and Jerusalem belongs to neither one nor the other." He stopped for a moment with an awkward feeling that the mention of Jerusalem might have embarrassed Swann, in view of 'current events,' but only went on more rapidly: "What you said just now might be said of anyone. We were at one time Dukes of Aumale, a duchy that has passed as regularly to the House of France as Joinville and Chevreuse have to the House of Albert. We make no more claim to those titles than to that of Marquis de Noirmoutiers, which was at one time ours, and became perfectly regularly the appanage of the House of La Trémoïlle, but because certain cessions are valid, it does not follow that they all are. For instance," he went on, turning to me, "my sister-in-law's son bears the title of Prince d'Agrigente, which comes to us from Joan the Mad, as that of Prince de Tarente comes to the La Trémoïlles. Well, Napoleon went and gave this title of Tarente to a soldier, who may have been admirable in the ranks, but in doing so the Emperor was disposing of what belonged to him even less than Napoleon III when he created a Duc de Montmorency, since Périgord had at least a mother who was a Montmorency, while the Tarente of Napoleon I had no more Tarente about him than Napoleon's wish that he should become so. That did not prevent Chaix d'Est-Ange, alluding to our uncle Condé, from asking the Procurer Impérial if he had picked up the title of Duc de Montmorency in the moat of Vincennes."

"Listen, Basin, I ask for nothing better than to follow you to the ditches of Vincennes, or even to Taranto. And that reminds me, Charles, of what I was going to say to you when you were telling me about your Saint George at Venice. We have an idea, Basin and I, of spending next spring in Italy and Sicily. If you were to come with us, just think what a difference it would make! I'm not thinking only of the pleasure of seeing you, but imagine, after all you've told me so often about the remains of the Norman Conquest and of ancient history, imagine what a trip like that would become if you came with us! I mean to say that even Basin—what am I saying, Gilbert—would benefit by it, because I feel that even his claims to the throne of Naples and all that sort of thing would interest me if they were explained by you in old romanesque churches in little villages perched on hills like primitive paintings. But now we're going to look at your photograph. Open the envelope," said the Duchess to a footman. "Please, Oriane, not this evening; you can look at it to-morrow," implored the Duke, who had already been making signs of alarm to me on seeing the huge size of the photograph. "But I like to look at it with Charles," said the Duchess, with a smile at once artificially concupiscent and psychologically subtle, for in her desire to be friendly to Swann she spoke of the pleasure which she would have in looking at the photograph as though it were the pleasure an invalid feels he would find in eating an orange, or as though she had managed to combine an escapade with her friends with giving information to a biographer as to some of her favourite pursuits. "All right, he will come again to see you, on purpose," declared the Duke, to whom his wife was obliged to yield. "You can spend three hours in front of it, if that amuses you," he added ironically. "But where are you going to stick a toy of those dimensions?" "Why, in my room, of course. I like to have it before my eyes." "Oh, just as you please; if it's in your room, probably I shall never see it," said the Duke, without thinking of the revelation he was thus blindly making of the negative character of his conjugal relations. "Very well, you will undo it with the greatest care," Mme. de Guermantes told the servant, multiplying her instructions out of politeness to Swann. "And see that you don't crumple the envelope, either." "So even the envelope has got to be respected!" the Duke murmured to me, raising his eyes to the ceiling. "But, Swann," he added, "I, who am only a poor married man and thoroughly prosaic, what I wonder at is how on earth you managed to find an envelope that size. Where did you pick it up?" "Oh, at the photographer's; they're always sending out things like that. But the man is a fool, for I see he's written on it 'The Duchesse de Guermantes,' without putting 'Madame.' " "I'll forgive him for that," said the Duchess carelessly; then, seeming to be struck by a sudden idea which enlivened her, checked a faint smile; but at once returning to Swann: "Well, you don't say whether you're coming to Italy with us?" "Madame, I am really afraid that it will not be possible." "Indeed! Mme. de Montmorency is more fortunate. You went with her to Venice and Vicenza. She told me that with you one saw things one would never see otherwise, things no one had ever thought of mentioning before, that you shewed her things she had never dreamed of, and that even in the well-known things she had been able to appreciate details which without you she might have passed by a dozen times without ever noticing. Obviously, she has been more highly favoured than we are to be. . . . You will take the big envelope from M. Swann's photograph," she said to the servant, "and you will hand it in, from me, this evening at half past ten at Mme. la Comtesse Molé's." Swann laughed. "I should like to know, all the same," Mme. de Guermantes asked him, "how, ten months before the time, you can tell that a thing will be impossible." "My dear Duchess, I will tell you if you insist upon it, but, first of all, you can see that I am very ill." "Yes, my little Charles, I don't think you look at all well. I'm not pleased with your colour, but I'm not asking you to come with me next week, I ask you to come in ten months. In ten months one has time to get oneself cured, you know." At this point a footman came in to say that the carriage was at the door. "Come, Oriane, to horse," said the Duke, already pawing the ground with impatience as though he were himself one of the horses that stood waiting outside. "Very well, give me in one word the reason why you can't come to Italy," the Duchess put it to Swann as she rose to say good-bye to us. "But, my dear friend, it's because I shall then have been dead for several months. According to the doctors I consulted last winter, the thing I've got—which may, for that matter, carry me off at any moment—won't in any case leave me more than three or four months to live, and even that is a generous estimate," replied Swann with a smile, while the footman opened the glazed door of the hall to let the Duchess out. "What's that you say?" cried the Duchess, stopping for a moment on her way to the carriage, and raising her fine eyes, their melancholy blue clouded by uncertainty. Placed for the first time in her life between two duties as incompatible as getting into her carriage to go out to dinner and shewing pity for a man who was about to die, she could find nothing in the code of conventions that indicated the right line to follow, and, not knowing which to choose, felt it better to make a show of not believing that the latter alternative need be seriously considered, so as to follow the first, which demanded of her at the moment less effort, and thought that the best way of settling the conflict would be to deny that any existed. "You're joking," she said to Swann. "It would be a joke in charming taste," replied he ironically. "I don't know why I am telling you this; I have never said a word to you before about my illness. But as you asked me, and as now I may die at any moment . . . But whatever I do I mustn't make you late; you're dining out, remember," he added, because he knew that for other people their own social obligations took precedence of the death of a friend, and could put himself in her place by dint of his instinctive politeness. But that of the Duchess enabled her also to perceive in a vague way that the dinner to which she was going must count for less to Swann than his own death. And so, while continuing on her way towards the carriage, she let her shoulders droop, saying: "Don't worry about our dinner. It's not of any importance!" But this put the Duke in a bad humour, who exclaimed: "Come, Oriane, don't stop there chattering like that and exchanging your jeremiads with Swann; you know very well that Mme. de Saint-Euverte insists on sitting down to table at eight o'clock sharp. We must know what you propose to do; the horses have been waiting for a good five minutes. I beg your pardon, Charles," he went on, turning to Swann, "but it's ten minutes to eight already. Oriane is always late, and it will take us more than five minutes to get to old Saint-Euverte's."

Mme. de Guermantes advanced resolutely towards the carriage and uttered a last farewell to Swann. "You know, we can talk about that another time; I don't believe a word you've been saying, but we must discuss it quietly. I expect they gave you a dreadful fright, come to luncheon, whatever day you like" (with Mme. de Guermantes things always resolved themselves into luncheons), "you will let me know your day and time," and, lifting her red skirt, she set her foot on the step. She was just getting into the carriage when, seeing this foot exposed, the Duke cried in a terrifying voice: "Oriane, what have you been thinking of, you wretch? You've kept on your black shoes! With a red dress! Go upstairs quick and put on red shoes, or rather," he said to the footman, "tell the lady's maid at once to bring down a pair of red shoes." "But, my dear," replied the Duchess gently, annoyed to see that Swann, who was leaving the house with me but had stood back to allow the carriage to pass out in front of us, could hear, "since we are late." "No, no, we have plenty of time. It is only ten to; it won't take us ten minutes to get to the Parc Monceau. And, after all, what would it matter? If we turned up at half past eight they'd have to wait for us, but you can't possibly go there in a red dress and black shoes. Besides, we shan't be the last, I can tell you; the Sassenages are coming, and you know they never arrive before twenty to nine." The Duchess went up to her room. "Well," said M. de Guermantes to Swann and myself, "we poor, down-trodden husbands, people laugh at us, but we are of some use all the same. But for me, Oriane would have been going out to dinner in black shoes." "It's not unbecoming," said Swann, "I noticed the black shoes and they didn't offend me in the least." "I don't say you're wrong," replied the Duke, "but it looks better to have them to match the dress. Besides, you needn't worry, she would no sooner have got there than she'd have noticed them, and I should have been obliged to come home and fetch the others. I should have had my dinner at nine o'clock. Good-bye, my children," he said, thrusting us gently from the door, "get away, before Oriane comes down again. It's not that she doesn't like seeing you both. On the contrary, she's too fond of your company. If she finds you still here she will start talking again, she is tired out already, she'll reach the dinner-table quite dead. Besides, I tell you frankly, I'm dying of hunger. I had a wretched luncheon this morning when I came from the train. There was the devil of a *béarnaise* sauce, I admit, but in spite of that I shan't be at all sorry, not at all sorry to sit down to dinner. Five minutes to eight! Oh, women, women! She'll give us both indigestion before to-morrow. She is not nearly as strong as people think." The Duke felt no compunction at speaking thus of his wife's ailments and his own to a dying man, for the former interested him more, appeared to him more important. And so it was simply from good breeding and good fellowship that, after politely shewing us out, he cried 'from off stage,' in a stentorian voice from the porch to Swann, who was already in the courtyard: "You, now, don't let yourself be taken in by the doctors' nonsense, damn them. They're donkeys. You're as strong as the Pont Neuf. You'll live to bury us all!"